RED CRAG

LO KUANG-PIN and YANG YI-YEN

FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS PEKING

First Edition 1978

Printed in the People's Republic of China

LIST OF PRINCIPAL CHARACTERS

Cheng Kang	*Manager of the Assembly Plant of the Yangtze Ordnance Works.*
Cheng Ke-chang	*secret agent of the MIB (Military Investigation Bureau).*
Cheng Yao	*Cheng Kang's sister, a student at Chungking University.*
Chi Hsiao-hsuan	*a political prisoner at Pai House.*
Chiang Hsueh-chin (Sister Chiang)	*Secretary of the Shatse District of the Chungking Party Underground.*
Elder Brother	*a political prisoner at Chatzetung.*
Fu Chih-kao	*chief accountant of the Tachuan Bank.*
Grandma	*Hua Wei's mother, Commander of the Mount Hua-ying guerilla detachment.*
Hsu Peng-fei	*Director of the Second Department of the Kuomintang's Bureau of Military and Administrative Affairs of the Southwest (Southwest Bureau).*
Hsu Yun-feng	*a member of the Municipal Committee of the Chungking Party Underground.*
Hua Tze-liang	*a political prisoner at Pai House.*
Hua Wei	*a student at Chungking University.*
Lao Yuan	*a political prisoner at Pai House.*
Li Chi-kang	*secret agent of the MIB.*
Li Ching-yuan	*Vice-Secretary of the Municipal Committee of the Chungking Party Underground.*
Liu Sze-yang	*a member of the Chungking Party Underground and a leader of the student movement.*
Lung Kuang-hua	*a political prisoner at Chatzetung.*
Mao Jen-feng	*Director of the Kuomintang's Bureau of Confidential Information.*

Shen Yang-chai	*Vice-Director of the Southwest Special District of the Kuomintang's MIB.*
Ting Chang-fa	*a political prisoner at Chatzetung.*
Wei Chi-po	*secret agent of the Second Department of the Kuomintang's Southwest Bureau.*
Yen Tsui	*Director of the Southwest Special District of the Kuomintang's MIB.*
Yu Hsing-chiang	*a worker at the Assembly Plant of the Yangtze Ordnance Works.*

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A heavy grey fog lay like a pall over the mountain city at the junction of the Yangtze and Chialing rivers, and the Monument to the Victory of the War of Resistance* was hidden in the dense mist. The gloomy morning heralded the beginning of another year in an era of turmoil.

It was New Year's day, and in spite of the damp and cold, the streets in the apparently prosperous shopping districts were crowded with pedestrians.

A barefooted newspaper boy ran through the fog, shouting: "Paper! Paper! *Central Daily*! *Peace Daily*...! China's prospects for 1948!...Read all about it! United States nuclear exercises! Third world war imminent! Read all about it!"

As he hawked his papers, he continued to shout: "Read all about it! The police order! Fireworks prohibited over the New Year! No firecrackers! Strict precautions against fires!"

Yu Hsin-chiang, walking swiftly through the stream of pedestrians, involuntarily started at the mention of fire. He glanced over his shoulder, but the newspaper boy had disappeared in the crowd, his voice fading in the distance:

"Read the local news! Public functionary bankrupt! Whole family take poison! Leaves long suicide letter...! Read all about it!"

Yu Hsin-chiang was not dressed like a worker today. His stocky body was garbed in a neat blue cotton high-button jacket. A pair of deep-set, penetrating eyes gleamed under his heavy black eyebrows. He was not yet thirty, but his serious manner was that of a much older man and gave one a feeling of capa-

* Now re-named Monument to the Liberation of the Chungking People.

bility and prudence. His brows contracted slightly as he heard the newsboy's shouts, and he hastened his steps, swinging his arms vigorously. Either because he was hot or for convenience, he had rolled up his sleeves, revealing darkly-tanned forearms and large calloused hands.

He picked his way through the milling crowd, stopping now and then as buses drove by, trailing long black clouds of exhaust fumes. The rattle and screech of these antiquated diesel-engined vehicles, the strident calls of hawkers and stall-keepers peddling surplus U.S. goods, the yells of hurrying ricksha men and the noise of the holiday crowd filled the streets with a chaotic din.

Yu Hsin-chiang walked along, preoccupied with his own thoughts, but the kaleidoscopic street scenes continuously forced themselves on his attention: the tall buildings lining both sides of the street, markets, banks, restaurants, dance-halls, employment agencies and unusually thriving auction shops were all garishly decorated with boldly inscribed New Year's greetings. This year the decorations were somewhat different, probably a trick by some commercial establishment to attract attention: long ribbons of brand-new ten-thousand-dollar bills pasted together festooned the tall fog-shrouded buildings instead of the usual red and green silk streamers. Some shops were even using the newly-issued hundred-thousand-dollar bills as if anticipating that million-dollar bills would soon come rolling off the printing presses! The businessmen had probably reckoned that it was cheaper to use worthless banknotes than to buy red and green silk streamers. It was unfortunate that the hundred-thousand-dollar bills were no bigger and no better printed than the ten-thousand-dollar ones and with their drab colours were less attractive to the eye. These streamers of "national currency" fluttered and rustled in the slightest breeze. No one seemed to find the use of money as decoration lacking in respect, and though the authorities had prohibited fireworks displays, they had not forbidden this.

Big posters blowing about in the icy wind, advertised in glaring letters: New Year's cut-price sale! We sell at a loss! Buy

one article and get another free! Sacrifice sale! Yu Hsin-chiang was not taken in by these devices. Everyone knew that a nought had been previously added to all the price tags, and it did not require much imagination to realize that behind these posters were worried men struggling on the verge of bankruptcy.

A woman's voice warbled a song from a loudspeaker at the top of the Victory Monument: "Fragrant flowers are few, and rare is the beautiful view. . . ."

Several long blasts from an automobile horn startled the pedestrians and scattered a crowd of street urchins scrambling for cigarette butts. Yu Hsin-chiang looked casually around, and saw a white-painted police car speeding along. It was closely followed by several streamlined closed cars, flying the Stars and Stripes, with "U.S. Information Service" painted on their sides in Chinese. Escorted by fully-armed police, the cars drove towards the Victory Building where the municipal authorities were holding a New Year's reception party for the "Allies." Yu Hsin-chiang frowned at the cars as he noticed that the passengers included some of the Americans who often came to the armament works. He suddenly observed that someone had stuck a poster, "Yanks Go Home!" on the upswept tail of the last car. Yu Hsin-chiang glared at the passing cars, crossed the busy street, and continued on his way.

He made a deliberate detour through several streets, and when he was sure that he was not being followed headed straight for the lodgings for employees of the Tachuan Bank. They were situated in a tree-lined avenue near the centre of the city, and though it was New Year, few of the residents were about. He pressed the door-bell at No. 5 and the black-painted door was slowly opened by a middle-aged man. He was dressed in a Western suit of dark-blue serge, and had an overcoat thrown over his shoulders. Nodding to Yu Hsin-chiang, he beckoned him to come in, and by force of habit, glanced up and down the street before closing the door. His movements created the impression that he was accustomed to living in a difficult and complicated situation.

On entering the parlour of the house, the caller was struck by its well-cared-for appearance. It was neat and clean, and a cloth had been spread over a little round table on which was a vase of fragrant plum blossom. A colourful display of New Year cards and several dishes of sweets gave it a festive appearance. Scrolls decorated the wall, among them the painting of a horse by Hsu Pei-hung (Ju Péon). A glowing charcoal fire in the brazier made the room warm and cosy, but although Yu Hsin-chiang did not feel as much at home here as he did in the workers' simple living quarters, neither did he find it too unpleasant. He fully understood the struggle was very involved, and that underground Party members had to protect the organization and themselves from persecution by the reactionaries. If the work required his host to adopt this mode of life as a camouflage, then of course it was right for him to live this way. Yu Hsin-chiang walked over to a sofa by the window, explaining that Lao Hsu* had sent him; and his host, Fu Chih-kao remarked, "I saw the fire on the other side of the river last night. I was thinking. . . ." He hung up his coat and busied himself making tea, then hospitably asked: "Which do you prefer, Dragon Well or scented tea?"

"It's all the same to me," Yu Hsin-chiang replied. "I usually drink cold water."

Fu Chih-kao laughed, and set a cup of tea on a small tea table saying: "When comrades come to see me, I practise communism. I share and share alike." Then he scrutinized the deep-set eyes of his companion and patted him lightly on the shoulder.

"Hsin-chiang, you didn't sleep last night, did you?" he asked. "How did the fire start?"

Fu Chih-kao was a member of the Shatse** district Party committee and specialized in economic affairs. Yu Hsin-chiang was distressed by these inquiries into events at the plant. In his

* Lao, literally "old," put before surnames as a sign of familiarity.

** Short for Shapingpa and Tsechikou, two districts on the outskirts of the city proper.

mind he relived the scenes of the previous night: fierce fire engulfing whole rows of sheds, leaping flames roaring and crackling and casting their fiery glow into the night sky. He picked up his cup and nervously gulped down the tea without answering, as if he were parched with thirst.

"Don't worry," said Fu Chih-kao trying to comfort him, his expression showing that he had already given the matter some thought. "We are sure to find a way to help the workers. How much money does Lao Hsu think is necessary?"

After a moment's pause, Fu Chih-kao, a note of concern in his voice, continued: "Did you read the papers? They say that the plant caught fire because of 'carelessness' on the part of the workers." He picked up a copy of the *Central Daily* and pointed to a subhead, saying: "I think there's more to this than meets the eye, what do you say?"

Yu Hsin-chiang jumped to his feet, heavy eyebrows quivering: "Caught fire? A big lie! Secret agents started that fire, I saw them with my own eyes!"

He recalled how he had rushed towards the scene of the fire and come upon a crowd of workers, among them the master workman Hsiao, the Party secretary at the Artillery Plant. They were marching along two securely trussed fire-raisers. The workers had recognized them as secret agents, members of the armament works' security staff.

Yu Hsin-chiang glared at the wall as if the two arsonists were standing there in front of him. After a long pause, he said to Fu Chih-kao: "These two secret agents were caught red-handed. They confessed that they had started the fire on orders from the Second Department of the Southwest Bureau."

"The Second Department?" Fu Chih-kao was startled. "That is an organization of the MIB!"*

Intent on his own angry thoughts, Yu Hsin-chiang did not

* Military Investigation Bureau, the biggest secret service organization of the Kuomintang. Its full name was the Bureau of Investigation and Statistics of the Military Council of the Kuomintang.

hear Fu Chih-kao's exclamation. Stepping forward, he said with grim determination:

"The monk can run away, but not the monastery. We'll make the enemy pay for all the losses suffered by the workers!"

He remembered that before the fire many signs of impending trouble had been observed at the branch factories of the Yangtze Ordnance Works. First, large numbers of soldiers and police had arrived at the factories and compelled the workers to work longer hours and extra shifts. Then the authorities had said that the workers' shacks at the Artillery Plant were occupying space required for factory expansion. They had tried to force the workers to pull down their own living quarters and move out. Last night the enemy had started the blaze, thus bringing the struggle to fever pitch. Today, the workers of all the branch factories of the armament works were to assemble at the Artillery Plant. The authorities had sneaked out of the plant, but the angry workers were determined to take possession of the construction material which had been prepared for the expansion of the factory, and use it to rebuild their shacks, now in ashes. The struggle would continue until victory was achieved! Yu Hsin-chiang banged the little round table with his clenched fist, bringing down a shower of plum blossom.

Yu Hsin-chiang's emotion touched a chord of sympathy in Fu Chih-kao, who because of the nature of his work, had little opportunity of participating in mass movements, but was, nevertheless, keenly aware of the political situation.

"Yes," he said, "Chungking's armament industry constitutes eighty per cent of Chiang Kai-shek's productive capacity. If he wants to do a good job as 'quartermaster' and make up for his heavy losses of U.S. equipment, he must devote greater attention to Chungking!" Fu Chih-kao's eyes flashed with unusual emotion as he asked: "Hsin-chiang, do you remember how last spring before the *Hsinhua Daily** was stopped Comrade Wu**

* Organ of the Chinese Communist Party then published in Chungking.

** Wu Yu-chang, then Secretary of the Szechuan Provincial Party Committee.

sharply condemned the enemy? 'Just look!' he said. 'Your armament works are on the other bank of the river, for months now they have been going full blast, manufacturing arms day and night. What does that signify?' It is obvious that the U.S.-Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries are intent on continuing the civil war and have reached the stage where they will stop at nothing! This time our Party must lead the workers' struggle to the end!"

"We Chungking workers must not soil our hands by helping the reactionaries to slaughter the people," said Yu Hsin-chiang. As he spoke, the significance and importance of the current struggle to oppose the removal of the workers' living quarters and the expansion of the factory became increasingly clear to him. "Lao Hsu says that he has decided to expose publicly the enemy's criminal incendiarism and muster support from all quarters. We will also start a campaign among all the workers in the city for funds to alleviate the hardships of the Artillery Plant workers, until the time when the enemy is made to compensate them for their losses. . . ."

Fu Chih-kao broke in before Yu Hsin-chiang had finished speaking, saying: "I can find some way to help out until the donations are available." He realized that it was no easy matter to support several hundred workers' families; but some of the Party's expenditure came within the scope of his responsibilities.

Yu Hsin-chiang nodded and stated the amount needed for the present, adding: "Lao Hsu says that whatever you lend us will be paid back out of the donations."

"Don't worry about that. I'll give you the money tomorrow."

New Year had just passed and there was not much ready cash about, but Fu Chih-kao did not mention it. On the contrary, he offered to find some way of obtaining more, if that wasn't enough.

Noticing that Yu Hsin-chiang looked very weary, he urged him: "You must take a rest and have a bite to eat before leaving." Looking at his watch, he added: "My wife has gone shopping, she'll be back any moment now. The maidservant

has gone to her village to spend the New Year with her family, so we are cooking our own meals these days."

Yu Hsin-chiang failed to notice the other's concern. He was not given to conversation, and his temperament was such that he forgot everything else when he had work to do. If some matter required his attention, he could not even be bothered with meals. His mother often complained that he did not take proper care of his health and Lao Hsu had also criticized him for this, but it was difficult for him to change his ways, particularly at present, when there was so much to do. He had less time than ever for eating and sleeping. The truth was that Lao Hsu also neglected himself when busy. After hearing Yu Hsin-chiang's report that morning he had gone to the factory without a bite of breakfast, and before parting had assigned him several tasks.

"There's something else." Yu Hsin-chiang looked at Fu Chih-kao. "Lao Hsu intends to set up a reserve liaison post in the Shatse District."

This idea had been taking shape with the development of the workers' movement in the Shatse District factories, but up to the present, Lao Hsu had not made up his mind who should be entrusted with this task. He had hesitated because he did not want the setting up of the liaison post to be mixed up with other aspects of the work of the Shatse district Party committee of which he was responsible. Remembering Lao Hsu's attitude to this matter, Yu Hsin-chiang stressed:

"The liaison post has to be kept separate from the work among the masses, so Lao Hsu plans to entrust this special task to you. He wants to know whether you will agree or not."

"Chiang Hsueh-chin is leaving soon and the district committee intends to put me in charge of some work in the students' movement," Fu Chih-kao smiled complacently and took on this new task without the least hesitation. Indeed, any task, any additional work was a source of satisfaction to him.

He said: "There are quite a number of educational institutions in the Shapingpa area, and a bookshop would be just the

right cover for a liaison post. The question of finances presents no difficulty, but we shall need a trustworthy shop attendant."

"Lao Hsu has already thought of someone."

"Who?"

"Chen Sung-lin, a worker comrade. He's a good friend of mine," said Yu Hsin-chiang by way of introduction.

"Splendid! When is he coming?"

"In a few days. You know the situation at the factory. . . ."

Fu Chih-kao was more than pleased when he heard that Lao Hsu had also considered the possibility of setting up a bookshop, and he was in high spirits. Yu Hsin-chiang said that Lao Hsu had advised that the bookshop should be small, free from any political associations and not carry any progressive books. . . .

"Yes, yes! I operated a liaison post myself a few years ago," Fu Chih-kao nodded and smiled. Then he changed the subject, "Hsin-chiang, have you read the latest edition of *Forward*?"

He took a roll of pink typing paper from his pocket. It was the underground Party paper, which he had been reading just before Yu's arrival.

"Look at this," he said, " 'The Present Situation and Our Tasks,' a truly inspiring document written by Chairman Mao Tse-tung. The Chinese Revolution has reached a great turning point! Victory is at hand!" Fu Chih-kao was deeply stirred. He shook a loose sheet, covered with closely-written characters, out of the newspaper, "These last days I've been thinking about what we should do to prove ourselves worthy of this great era. We must redouble our efforts in the mass movement, we must make greater contributions to the Party! The thought of the future fills me with boundless energy and strength. . . ."

The ringing of the door-bell interrupted him. "It must be my wife back from her shopping. You know," Fu Chih-kao confided to his caller, "she thinks a lot of you — a worker who also writes poetry. She read your short poems in the *Hsinhua Daily* and was deeply moved."

Yu Hsin-chiang was in a hurry to leave, but Fu Chih-kao wouldn't hear of it. He pushed him down into the chair as he

said: "She's very eager to meet you and she'll cook you a few simple dishes which I'm sure you'll enjoy. It's cold today and I can't allow you to work for the Party on an empty stomach!" So saying he eagerly thrust the sheet of paper which he had shaken out of the newspaper into Yu Hsin-chiang's hands, explaining that it contained his reflections after studying Chairman Mao's epoch-making document. He had spent two whole nights putting them down and intended to have them published in the Party's underground publication. He asked Yu Hsin-chiang to read them and let him have his comments.

The bell rang again. Fu Chih-kao threw his overcoat over his shoulders and with a happy smile went to open the door.

The new bookshop opened on Shapingpa's High Street. It was rather small and, in addition to selling ordinary books and publications, dealt in all kinds of second-hand textbooks. The customers were mostly students from local colleges and middle schools.

The assistant was Chen Sung-lin, a round-faced young fellow of about nineteen years, short but solidly built. He had been transferred from the Repair Plant. No one at the plant knew that he had become a shop assistant. He had never done this kind of work before and missed the militant atmosphere of the workshop. He was very anxious to know what was happening at the Artillery Plant, but had no way of finding out and was not allowed to make random inquiries. Moreover, the bookshop was as yet only a reserve liaison post, and Lao Hsu had not yet visited it. Under these circumstances Chen Sung-lin felt that he wasn't doing very much for the Party.

The bookshop was under the direction of Fu Chih-kao, who while maintaining his position as chief of the accounting department at the bank, was nominally its manager. He frequently came to the bookshop to give advice to Chen Sung-lin who did not know the ropes. As he was a man of wide experience, his directions were practical and down-to-earth. He had many good

ideas, and it wasn't long before he had won Chen Sung-lin's respect and confidence.

Chen Sung-lin had no acquaintances hereabouts, and when the bookshop was closed on Mondays, he would go to nearby Chungking University, where Fu Chih-kao had instructed him to deliver some publications printed in Shanghai and Hongkong to a student named Hua Wei. He met the student once a week and they soon became friends.

Today was his day off again. Chen Sung-lin changed his clothes, rolled up two copies of the *Masses*, a Hongkong magazine, in a newspaper, locked up the shop, and walked towards Chungking University.

Turning into the street leading to the university, he passed the Shatse Hospital. The gate of the Youth Hall across the street was decorated with two crossed Kuomintang flags. A big red poster announced that some professor was going to give a talk on "The Truth of Saving the Nation Through Study." It also announced that a film would be shown after the lecture. Chen Sung-lin gave it a cursory glance as he walked past.

The road leading through this district was generally plastered with students' advertisements, offering books and clothing for sale. Today, however, many other notices had appeared, and Chen Sung-lin noticed with surprise that they called upon the students to make donations to help the workers at the Artillery Plant. One huge red paper sign read: Lend a helping hand to our suffering worker brothers! It also carried a special report describing how secret agents had burnt down the workers' quarters at the plant because they had refused to produce armaments for the civil war and had also refused to make way for the expansion of the plant. This sign had been scribbled over with reactionary slogans: "Down with the red medical college!" "Rumour-mongering!" However, alongside them was another slogan: "Defend freedom of speech! Oppose the civil war!"

He came across many rival slogans, which reflected the sharp conflict between the different forces. What a contrast between these and the posters advertising empty speeches on so-called

"truth" which he had just passed lower down the street! He also observed that some of the notices had been torn and others were scrawled over with offensive remarks, such as: "Sedition!" "Insults to the Generalissimo!" "Undermining the government!" But an edition of the *Comet*, a student paper, created the deepest impression on Chen Sung-lin. It had been torn down before the paste had time to dry, and only the name of the newspaper and half the editorial remained. The editorial was captioned: "Protest Against the Plot to Expand the Civil War!"

Chen Sung-lin had heard Hua Wei say that Chungking University, like other educational institutions, was preparing to join in the struggle with the workers who had suffered from the fire. Nevertheless, he was amazed to see that matters had already reached such a pitch at the university. One notice in particular caught his eye. It read:

> The Students' Self-Government Association at Chungking University has invited a workers' representative from the Artillery Plant of the Yangtze Armament Works to deliver a report on the facts of the fire.
> Place: Students' Club-House.
> Time: Nine o'clock, Monday morning.

Beside it a rival poster announced:

> The Chungking University branch of the San Min Chu Yi Youth Corps* has invited Professor Hou Fang to make a speech on "The Truth of Saving the Nation Through Study."
> Place: The Shapingpa Youth Hall.
> Time: 8:30, Monday morning.
> (After the meeting the Hollywood technicolour film, *Bathing Beauty*, will be shown.)

"The bastards! They're trying to steal the show!" swore Chen Sung-lin. It was obvious that the San Min Chu Yi Youth Corps was trying to get an audience by using a sexy film as bait. They often used this trick when peddling their reactionary wares.

There were other notices stuck all over the place, one issued by the Students' Refectory Committee at the College of Law,

* A fascist youth organization of the Kuomintang.

urging the students to pay up their board fees. "No money, no food!" threatened the notification. Chen Sung-lin walked on.

His attention was attracted by a commotion in the distance, and he turned his steps towards a clump of trees from whence the noise came. Students were crowded in the doorway of the Proctor's office, and more students were joining them from all directions. Some were shouting: "Fellow students, hurry up, come to the Proctor's office!"

Chen Sung-lin unconsciously hastened his footsteps and followed the stream of students. Some overtook and passed him in their haste and he heard them asking each other what had happened. By the time he reached the trees, a dense crowd had formed an impenetrable human wall around the Proctor's office. He thought he saw Hua Wei pushing his way forward, but lost sight of him again.

A high clear voice could be heard coming from the front of the crowd protesting: "Is there any guarantee at all for the students' safety? Will the Proctor kindly answer this question?" It was a girl's voice and seemed familiar to Chen Sung-lin, but he could not place it. The human wall in front of him obstructed his view, and although he stood on tiptoe, he still couldn't see the speaker, nor anything else for that matter.

The sound of a dry, harsh voice, evidently forcing itself to appear calm, came from the office, cutting short the girl student's denunciation. "Don't make such a row. We do not tolerate coercion and rabble-rousing. Everyone except the representatives keep silent. Who are the representatives?"

Again the voice of the girl student was heard. "I'm the representative of the College of Arts."

"What department? Your registration number? Your name?" rapped out the Proctor.

The girl student was not intimidated by the questions of the shrivelled-up Proctor, and back came her firm answer: "My name is Cheng Yao, and I'm a first-year student in the department of Chinese literature."

Cheng Yao? Chen Sung-lin was startled. Wasn't she the younger sister of Manager Cheng of the Repair Plant? Chen Sung-lin had often seen her there, and had been told that she studied at Chungking University, but he had only known her as a lively young girl and had never before heard her speak with such firmness. Now she was a student representative giving voice to the students' demands!

"She's our department representative. Let her speak! Quiet, fellow students!"

From among the crowd came a few scattered whistles and hisses.

"Who's heckling? Step forward, and let's see your ugly mugs!"

"Fellow students, this is the way things stand —" continued Cheng Yao, who had the support of the majority of the students. The hubbub died down somewhat. Her voice rang out, clear and deliberate. "Last night, the College of Arts called a meeting of the representatives of all its departments and sections to discuss proposals to assist the workers at the Artillery Plant who are in dire need as the result of the fire. The student Wei Chi-po, a spy. . . ."

"What right have you to slander people?" someone in the crowd shouted. "What proof have you?"

"He's a secret agent, either of the MIB or the CIB!* Everybody knows what he is!" someone called out.

"Don't speak out of turn," came the Proctor's icy voice from the office. "Only the representative may speak. In an educational institution of our standing all statements must be backed by full proof."

"Of course I have proof!" Cheng Yao's voice became even more excited. "That spy Wei Chi-po tried to disrupt the meeting last night, but he failed. This morning while he was drawing up a blacklist he was caught by students of our department. Take a look, fellow students! This is the proof! Here is the

* Central Investigation Bureau, Kuomintang secret service organization.

blacklist in his own handwriting! We also found secret orders from the police in his pockets!" The fury of the crowd erupted like a volcano. A tall lanky student wearing a blue cloth gown, standing in front of Chen Sung-lin, shouted: "Those secret agents are going too far! Where's Wei Chi-po? Bring him out!"

"Wei Chi-po is in the office," said Cheng Yao. "We demand that the university authorities take this matter in hand and deal with it effectively. Fellow students, listen! I'll read out his secret orders, and the blacklist he prepared. . . ."

"Take a photo of him and let everyone see it! Hold a public inquiry!"

"Right! And let the department of law take charge of it!"

The Proctor spoke again, but this time his voice was tinged with a note of apprehension:

"Students, do not be carried away by your emotions! Let everyone be calm! This is an institution of higher education, the highest in Southwest China. We cannot arrest people, nor have we the right to conduct trials!"

Back came the challenge from the students: "We'd like to ask the Proctor, is the drawing up of a blacklist legal or not?"

"What do you mean 'carried away by emotions'?" The lanky student in the blue gown was again challenging the Proctor. Chen Sung-lin noticed that his face was flushed with anger.

"Fellow students!" he shouted, "we cannot allow spies to run amuck within the sacred precincts of our university. We demand that the university authorities guarantee the safety of all faculty members and students!"

"Hear, hear!"

At this moment a shadowy figure jumped out of the window at the back of the office and stealthily slunk away. Shouts immediately rang out:

"Wei Chi-po is escaping!"

"The Proctor has allowed the spy to escape!"

A roar of indignation burst from the assembled students:

"The spy has escaped, but the Proctor can't run away. We'll settle accounts with him!"

"Hand the spy over to us! Hand him over!" In spite of himself, Chen Sung-lin was now shouting in chorus with the students.

"Fellow students, after him! Chase him!" yelled the lanky student in a high-pitched voice, and gathering up the skirt of his blue gown, he rushed out of the crowd and led the chase at breakneck speed. A swarm of students followed him, but he kept way out front and gradually closed in on his quarry.

Chen Sung-lin exulted as he hurried after the chase; they're going to catch the spy! Like the students, he too was eager to see the secret agent caught.

The fleeing secret agent suddenly wheeled around and ran into a clump of trees. The lanky student, who was far ahead of the others, turned to follow him. Suddenly he staggered. The hands which had been holding up his gown rose to clasp his head, and he collapsed.

What had happened? Chen Sung-lin was bewildered. In the ensuing uproar he clearly heard: "Murderous secret agents!" "Rescue him!" He made out figures darting among the trees, heard a motor roar and saw a jeep shoot out of the trees, hustling away the escaping spy and the would-be murderers. The jeep skirted the campus and was soon lost to view. This jeep had driven up within the last hour. Chen Sung-lin had heard its engine while he was standing at the entrance to the office, but because he like all the students was excited, he had not thought its presence had anything to do with the incident in progress.

"The chief editor of the *Comet* has been wounded," said someone. "He's a third-year student in the law department."

The *Comet*? Chen Sung-lin thought quickly and recalled the progressive newspaper he had just seen, the one ripped by hoodlums. So, the lanky student in the blue gown was the chief editor of the *Comet*!

A stone had cut a deep gash in his scalp and blood was streaming down his face. He was helped back by students who kept calling his name:

"Li Chi-kang! Li Chi-kang!"

Hua Wei was also among them, but he did not see Chen Sung-lin and hurried off with the students.

The students had again gathered at the door of the office, clamouring for the Proctor who had connived at the spy's escape. They challenged him to come out and answer their accusations.

Chen Sung-lin was furious with rage. He had seen enough. Skirting the pine-covered slope, he made straight for Hua Wei's dormitory. The events he had just witnessed had aroused his sympathy and affection for the wounded student, whom the others called Li Chi-kang.

2

NIGHT had fallen but the stream of customers in the bookshop had not abated. It was full of students, who came at dusk after supper to buy or browse. Chen Sung-lin was too busy serving them to have time to pay attention to their noisy chatter.

In front of one of the bookshelves, a student wearing the badge of the Szechuan College of Education was telling a middle-school student about the events at Chungking University. Chen Sung-lin chanced to overhear his remarks and pricked up his ears.

"So there's going to be a strike at Chungking University! Tell me more about it," said the middle-school student.

"Secret agents tried to kill someone. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin would have liked to listen, but just then a customer wanted him to take the money for two books, so he had to move away.

Chen Sung-lin gathered from odd bits of conversation that the ugly scene he had witnessed before the Proctor's office had aroused the students' ire. There was the possibility of a strike at the university, and the other educational institutions in the Shatse District were preparing to give them support. This was good news. The increasingly frequent struggles in the factories and schools, coupled with the people's bitter resentment at the hardships of their lives, were sure to keep the enemy's hands full.

Chen Sung-lin had been busy all the evening, but now it was late and there were few customers left. Fu Chih-kao came in, and like any other customer, leafed through the books and publications on the shelves. Tonight, however, he had a special purpose in coming to the shop.

His attention was drawn to a long-haired, pale-faced youth, who had been standing at a shelf for a long time, absorbed in a book. His cheeks showed up thin and drawn under the electric lights, and Fu Chih-kao discreetly examined him with a feeling of pity. This must be the young man Chen Sung-lin had told him about.

It was nearly closing time, but the young man was lost in his book. Chen Sung-lin had no intention of disturbing him, for Fu Chih-kao had once told him that special consideration should be shown to customers who liked to read and he knew that he should be patient when trying to approach this melancholy youth.

He was a frequent caller at the bookshop, and came at all times of the day — sometimes in the morning, at other times in the afternoon or evening. He would always stand silently by the bookshelves, reading books on literary theory and translated novels. Sometimes he would be carried away by the story and unconsciously read aloud, much to the annoyance of other readers who would glare at him angrily. Sometimes he would buy one or two cheap books. Chen Sung-lin had told Fu Chih-kao that when the young man had bought a copy of the *Biography of Hsiao Hung,* he had told him with deep feeling that Hsiao Hung had been one of China's few women authors and had been one of Lu Hsun's students. He said it was a great misfortune that this evil society had deprived her of life at such an early age.

The young man's clothing was old and worn and his movements were clumsy. He didn't look like a student, and was probably a junior clerk. But if that were the case, why didn't he ever go to work? How was he able to spend so many hours at the bookshop? Fu Chih-kao had been intending to ask him for some time, but the chance had never presented itself. If he were too forward or appeared too eager, he might create an unnecessary misunderstanding.

Chen Sung-lin arranged some books on the shelf, and without any apparent intention moved closer to the young man. He intended to address him. Fu Chih-kao thought with satisfaction that although Chen Sung-lin was young, he was obedient and

clever and showed promise of becoming an excellent assistant after some training. The young man now seemed somewhat embarrassed and buried his face in the pages of his book. Fu Chih-kao could see that he was ill at ease. He was probably worried that he might be incurring the displeasure of the clerk by reading books for so many hours without hardly ever buying any. Chen Sung-lin moved nearer to him, but before he was able to say anything, the young man looked up. He was very embarrassed as he held out the book to Chen Sung-lin, and faltered:

"I — I haven't creased the book."

Chen Sung-lin smiled. "Do you like Gorky?"

"Oh! Yes, yes," answered the forlorn young man with a pathetic smile. "But I couldn't afford so big a book."

"What's your name?"

"Cheng," he replied, instinctively pressing the book to his chest, as he said, almost defensively: "I live at . . . Chungking University."

Noticing the young man's caution, Chen Sung-lin said, "Go ahead with your reading," and walked away.

Only a few customers now remained in the bookshop. Fu Chih-kao walked across to the young man and accosted him in a friendly manner. Recently, he had become particularly interested in getting closer to the people.

"The light is better over here, why don't you sit down and read?"

Once more, the young man seemed startled out of his absorption. He pulled himself together, replaced Gorky's *Mother* on the bookshelf and glanced apologetically at Fu Chih-kao.

"I'm sorry, it's past closing time and I've been keeping you."

"Not at all, go ahead and read."

"Thank you, but it's very late already. I'm sorry. . . ."

The young man reluctantly walked out of the shop into the night. As Fu Chih-kao watched his wasted figure, he was full of sympathy and lost in thought.

After the shop had been closed up, Fu Chih-kao went upstairs

to Chen Sung-lin's small bedroom. He sat down at the desk and leafed through Chen Sung-lin's notes on his studies. He observed that although Chen Sung-lin had not had much education, he had made copious notes on "Philosophy for the Masses." He had also jotted down a few words of self-encouragement on the cover of the notebook. Fu Chih-kao lit a cigarette and fell to thinking. He was not much of a smoker, but recently the work had been proceeding very smoothly and had given him a feeling of well-being, and when in a particularly good mood, he enjoyed the occasional cigarette.

The bookshop had been in business for some time now, but he had not yet had an opportunity to have a good talk with Chen Sung-lin. Nation-wide victory was approaching, and he ought to make plans and do something about realizing his ideals and ambitions. He had thought about them before, but previously they had seemed vague and remote. Now the time was ripe to begin to carry them out. He had done some Party work in the past. In the early stages of the War of Resistance, immediately after he had joined the Party, he had taken part in many of the student movements of that period, and had often played an open and prominent role in these struggles. After the Southern Anhwei Incident,* however, conditions had deteriorated and he had been compelled to go underground. In the course of time, he had gained a good position in banking circles, and was now working for the Party

* In October 1940, in the name of the Military Council of the Kuomintang government, the die-hard KMT clique ordered the communist-led New Fourth Army and Eighth Route Army to shift towards the Yellow River. To avoid the rupture of the united front and persist in the War of Resistance Against Japan, the Chinese Communist Party, on the one hand, promised to order part of the New Fourth Army to shift north of the Yangtze River and on the other hand, exposed the anti-communist intrigues of the KMT.

On January 4, 1941, the New Fourth Army, which was fighting the Japanese invaders in southern Anhwei, crossed to the north of the Yangtze. During this redeployment, 80,000 KMT troops ambushed part of the New Fourth Army, killing, wounding or capturing over 9,000 men. Then Chiang Kai-shek announced the disbandment of the New Fourth Army, abolished its designation and ordered attack on the remaining New Fourth Army troops.

in the economic field. He had not had any more opportunities to join in mass movements. It had been difficult at first to adapt himself to the new methods of work during the White terror. In these dark and dangerous years, his only link with the Party was through one single contact, and sometimes he would have to wait months to meet his superior. This had been very trying. Now, however, he had become accustomed to the special methods of underground work and was quite at ease in the role he had to play, readily accepting upper-class connections and the style of life in banking circles to conceal himself. He and his wife led a secure life in the living quarters provided by the bank for its employees. They never revealed their real identities, nor caused any trouble for the Party. On the contrary, he had always executed the tasks entrusted him by the Party to the best of his ability.

Lately, Fu Chih-kao had become dissatisfied with this long period of tranquil living, and yearned to take part in other forms of struggle. This urge was different from the brash enthusiasm of his youth. It had become more evident and more compelling after repeated study of the great document, "The Present Situation and Our Tasks." The revolution had come to a turning point and the long revolutionary struggle was on the verge of triumph! The victory for which he had longed day and night was imminent! His pent-up emotions, his urgent desire to do more work, made him extraordinarily restless and several times recently he had asked the Party for extra assignments. He had hoped to take over work in the student movement from Sister Chiang, the outgoing district Party secretary, when she had handed over her responsibilities, but her job had been given to a newly-arrived comrade. Nevertheless, Hsu Yun-feng had given him the task of setting up this reserve liaison post. It was a secret assignment and none of the comrades on the district committee knew of it. Maybe Hsu Yun-feng's ideas on how to carry out this task differed somewhat from his own, but no matter how he looked at it, Fu Chih-kao felt that the fact that he had been given the task

was an indication of the Party's confidence in him. He was determined to discharge his duties to the best of his ability. He hoped for opportunities to do even more work either in financial circles or at the liaison post. If, for instance, the bookstore turned out to be a success, he could, on this basis, get a foothold in cultural circles. They provided good cover and there was little danger of exposure. The difficulties did not worry him, but he felt the lack of helpers. Chen Sung-lin was young and enthusiastic, and Fu Chih-kao considered his training an important task. He hoped the young comrade would mature quickly and be of even greater help to him in his work.

Footsteps on the staircase interrupted his train of thought. Chen Sung-lin was coming up after clearing up the bookshelves.

Fu Chih-kao looked with interest at his young and straightforward helper, and began to sound him out.

"Chen Sung-lin, are you settling in now?"

Chen Sung-lin smiled wryly.

"I feel as if I have a lot of surplus energy, and nothing to expend it on. I'd much rather be swinging a hammer."

"Are you still missing the factory?"

Chen Sung-lin made no attempt to hide his feelings.

"I wish I could go back! How are things at the Artillery Plant?"

"I hear things have reached a stalemate. . . ." Fu Chih-kao had not seen Yu Hsin-chiang for some time, so he didn't know much about the actual situation there either. "However, workers throughout the city are giving them assistance and the struggle is gaining momentum."

Chen Sung-lin's round eyes blinked. He would have liked to hear more, but further news was not forthcoming, and with a long-drawn sigh he sat down by the bed.

"Chen Sung-lin, don't you like the work here?" Fu Chih-kao asked with a smile.

Chen Sung-lin didn't quite know how to answer. "It's not that!" he said. "I'm prepared to do whatever the Party wants

me to do, it's only that. . . ." He left the sentence unfinished, and expressed his meaning by pounding the bed with his fist.

It was not strange that young Chen should feel like a fish out of water after leaving familiar surroundings to carry out a new and special task. Fu Chih-kao thought of how he himself had been separated from the mass movement while still a young man, and had gone underground for a long time. Hadn't he, too, felt unhappy? Fu Chih-kao was in no hurry to say more and puffed at his cigarette silently, studying the young fellow sitting before him.

"When will the bookshop expand?" Chen Sung-lin asked eagerly. Fu Chih-kao had told him some time ago that the bookshop would gradually expand and not only serve as a reserve liaison post, but also extend its activities into cultural circles. Chen Sung-lin was most eager to see the shop enlarged and extra assistants engaged.

"I was just about to discuss that matter with you."

As Chen Sung-lin looked at him expectantly, Fu Chih-kao told him that the purpose of expanding the bookshop was to enable them to do more work for the Party. "We shall be a liaison post and at the same time secretly sell progressive books and publications. Chen Sung-lin, when you provide the source of new knowledge and pass on precious documents to so many eager readers, won't you be happy at the thought that you're doing more work for the Party?"

Chen Sung-lin gazed at Fu Chih-kao with rapt attention. "Furthermore," Fu Chih-kao continued, "our readers are for the most part young students thirsting for knowledge. They yearn for the truth, for a militant life, and want to find the path to a better future. Therein lies our glorious task! We'll make a success of the bookshop and play more or less the same role as the *Hsinhua Daily* and all those progressive bookshops used to play. This is a vital job."

At this point, Fu Chih-kao could not restrain himself from telling Chen Sung-lin some facts of which the latter had little knowledge. He spoke of the growing development of armed

struggles in the rural areas and the drawing of large numbers of cadres from the cities to support the countryside. . . . Fu Chih-kao said: "All this demands that everyone should fully understand the special features of our times and be prepared to venture into new fields of activity!"

Chen Sung-lin listened and thought of his own work, then asked anxiously: "Well then, why don't we enlarge our bookshop now?"

"Everything must be carefully examined before we act, then twice as much can be accomplished with half the effort," Fu Chih-kao said slowly. Then he added that he had given the matter of the bookshop much consideration and now thought they could start with the preliminary work without delay.

Fu Chih-kao lit another cigarette, mused a moment, then continued: "Something else has occurred to me. After expanding the bookshop, we might publish some sort of a literary journal, as another means of uniting progressive young people. . . ."

This project took Chen Sung-lin by surprise. "Has the leadership approved this idea?"

"What's your opinion?" Fu Chih-kao asked in return. "Has the Party ever vetoed work that is beneficial for the masses? A revolutionary, particularly an underground Party member, should always look boldly ahead, act in the interest of the masses and use his own judgment on how best to serve the Party! If an underground Party member cannot look into the future, doesn't anticipate victory and dares not risk his life for the sake of the Party and the masses, and merely sits around, waiting for the Party to give him assignments, then he is not a real politically-conscious Communist." Fu Chih-kao had no doubts whatsoever.

Chen Sung-lin was deeply stirred and became absorbed in reflections on the work, on their ideals and on future developments. As he listened to Fu Chih-kao's bold statements, he couldn't help comparing him with Yu Hsin-chiang. He and Yu Hsin-chiang had been friends since childhood days, and had worked together at the Repair Plant as child labourers. Yu

Hsin-chiang was a few years older, and took an active part in class struggle before him. He had always been very strict with his younger comrade, and when Chen Sung-lin had been transferred to the bookshop, his friend had strictly cautioned him to break all contact with his former friends and comrades after leaving the plant. Fu Chih-kao's temperament and style of leadership were entirely different. He was never severe, encouraged him to be bold in his work, and was considerate in every way. Yet, Chen Sung-lin felt that there was an undefinable something in their characters that stood between them. He attributed this, however, to the fact that they had only known each other a short time and to his own personal failure to understand intellectuals. Moreover, he felt that he should not be making wild conjectures about his superiors and was even less entitled to raise objections to their methods of leadership. Anyway, he was quite satisfied with Fu Chih-kao's leadership and the help he gave him. With these thoughts in his mind, he found himself only half-listening to Fu Chih-kao and later could not recall what else he had said. It suddenly occurred to him that Fu Chih-kao had probably not yet eaten.

"I'm sorry, I forgot to ask you, but have you had your supper yet?"

Fu Chih-kao laughed and said understandingly: "I thought you might forget again to ask me to supper, so I ate before coming, but it's chilly today, and it wouldn't be a bad idea to have a drink to keep the cold out."

Chen Sung-lin went out to buy some wine and food. He set his purchases on the table and the two sat face to face, eating and chatting without any feelings of restraint. They discussed work, studies and life in general, and Fu Chih-kao listened like a kind older brother, patient and sympathetic, while Chen Sung-lin talked about his hopes and aspirations. Presently, the subject came back to the bookshop, the work at hand and the publications. This reminded Fu Chih-kao of Li Chi-kang and he inquired if there was any news about him. After returning from Chungking University on the day he had seen the chief

editor of the *Comet* wounded by the secret agents, Chen Sung-lin had reported the matter to Fu Chih-kao. On the latter's instructions he had taken more interest in Li Chi-kang and read some editions of the *Comet*. He found the contents progressive, in fact, some of its articles like those in certain other wall newspapers run by the students, were rather too "Leftist."

Fu Chih-kao suddenly asked: "How do things stand between Hua Wei and him?"

"They only began living in the same dormitory this year, and probably don't see much of each other," Chen Sung-lin hazarded. "Hua Wei says that Li Chi-kang has always been quite 'red.' During the mass arrests on June 1st last year, his name was on the blacklist and he came very close to being hauled in."

Fu Chih-kao thought about this for a while and then advised him: "Don't let Hua Wei know about your contacts with Li Chi-kang if you can avoid it."

Chen Sung-lin nodded. He guessed from this remark that Hua Wei was probably not under Fu Chih-kao's leadership. This assumption was supported by the fact that after his previous report, Fu Chih-kao had told him to strike up an acquaintance with Li Chi-kang instead of giving the task to Hua Wei who was right there in the university.

It was getting late. Chen Sung-lin cleared the table, picked up a washbasin and was about to go downstairs to get some water.

"Where are you going?"

"To get some water for you to wash your feet."

Fu Chih-kao stopped him. "Don't bother. The last bus into town doesn't leave for another ten minutes."

"It's very late. Why don't you stay here?"

"I have something to do," said Fu Chih-kao without any further explanation. As he was leaving, Fu Chih-kao glanced at the disappointed young man and said kindly: "We'll talk more next time. Work hard, I'm sure you'll achieve results before long. You obey orders and are already making good progress. . . ." He did not say any more, for he felt that too much praise was not good for a young immature comrade.

Chen Sung-lin accompanied him down the stairs. Just before leaving the shop, Fu Chih-kao turned to Chen Sung-lin.

"Find some way of getting acquainted with that young man who was reading Gorky," he instructed him. "He interests me."

"I have tried," Chen Sung-lin replied, "but. . . ."

"But what?"

Chen Sung-lin had already mentioned that the young man came to the shop very often. Fu Chih-kao had thought about this a great deal, but felt sure that the newly opened bookshop was not giving the enemy any cause for suspicion. He considered himself experienced and was confident in his own ability to judge men. He had seen the young man that day and had reached certain definite conclusions about him. He said quietly: "I think that he is a youngster who has lost his job. Chen Sung-lin, I told you just now that victory is approaching. Under the staunch leadership of our Party, we must have broad ties with the masses and leave no stone unturned to expand the forces of the revolution. This is the only correct way for us to greet and bring about the victory of the revolution."

Chen Sung-lin did not reply and was about to unfasten the door, but Fu Chih-kao now seemed to be in no hurry to leave. With evident satisfaction, he said:

"This is 1948, and we are on the eve of nation-wide victory. Anyone who can see further than the tip of his own nose should be aware that this era is vastly different from any previous one in the history of the revolution. However, we are not simply spectators, and it's not enough merely to be aware of the fact. We are revolutionaries and should combine our ideals and aspirations with carefully planned actions. Conditions vary, and undercover work requires greater vigilance, but we must not let that tie our hands. Undercover work must not be isolated from the masses nor from the struggle; close links with the masses are also necessary for undercover work because the masses will protect us. I'm sure you too see it in this way and fully agree with me."

Fu Chih-kao smiled, shook Chen Sung-lin's hand, and stepped out of the shop.

A few days later, Chen Sung-lin again went to Chungking University, making straight for Hua Wei's dormitory, which contained twenty double-tiered bunks. Here he saw the man who frequented the bookshop. He was lying on Li Chi-kang's bed, absorbed in a book. Chen Sung-lin remembered that this was the place where he had first seen Li Chi-kang. Li Chi-kang had been lying on his bed, and the fellow students who had helped him back had been staunching the flow of blood with a towel soaked in cold water. Seeing this young man here surprised him, and looking around to see no one was listening he asked Hua Wei in a whisper who he was. "Li Chi-kang says that's his cousin. He's lost his job and is putting up here temporarily," replied Hua Wei.

"Ah, Li Chi-kang's cousin! No wonder he's always visiting the bookshop!"

"Why are you inquiring about him?" Hua Wei asked curiously.

"He's a regular customer at our bookshop," replied Chen Sung-lin. Remembering Fu Chih-kao's instructions he gave no further explanation.

Just then Li Chi-kang returned to the dormitory, carrying two steamed buns which he handed to his cousin. Pity welled up in Chen Sung-lin's heart and he could not help remarking to Hua Wei:

"What a life, just living on a few buns a day!"

Hua Wei also felt sorry for him, and turned around to look at the young man wolfing down his buns.

A student came in, whispered a few words to Hua Wei, and the two went out together. As he was walking out, Hua Wei told Chen Sung-lin that he'd soon be back, and asked him to stay for lunch.

Chen Sung-lin poured himself a cup of water from Hua Wei's

thermos flask, sat on the bed, sipped the water and glanced at a newspaper.

He heard the young man ask, "Chi-kang, why didn't you bring back any drinking water?" and saw him set down an empty mug. Here was his chance to speak to him. He hesitated a moment, then poured out a cup of water and took it over to the young man.

Li Chi-kang's face lit up, as he inquired, "Ah, when did you come?" He thanked him for the cup of water, and introduced him to his cousin. "This is Chen Sung-lin, a new friend of mine — my cousin, Cheng Ke-chang. . . . He used to work in the post-office and is now trying to find a job."

Cheng Ke-chang looked up and slowly put out his hand to Chen Sung-lin, saying with a trace of embarrassment:

"We've met before at the bookshop." Then he added wryly: "I often go there to read books without paying."

Li Chi-kang looked surprised and exclaimed: "So you know each other already!"

"Not very well . . ." said Cheng Ke-chang slightly ashamed. "He — he spoke to me once, but at that time I was suspicious of him wondering why he always kept an eye on me. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin couldn't help laughing heartily.

"And who would have guessed that we'd become friends!"

"Yes, now we are friends!"

The two shook hands warmly while Li Chi-kang looked on with a smile.

"These quarters seem cramped," remarked Chen Sung-lin, looking at the narrow bunk. "Two in a berth — how do you manage to sleep?"

"It's cramped all right," Li Chi-kang said apologetically, "but there's nothing we can do about it, so we just double up for the time being."

"My cousin gets most of his sleep at night." Cheng Ke-chang hastened to explain, "As I have nothing to do, I read at night and make up for lost sleep in the daytime when he goes to class."

"So this is a case of sleeping in turn!"

All three laughed.

"I'll go and get some water," said Cheng Ke-chang, slowly emptying his mug.

Chen Sung-lin pointed towards Hua Wei's bunk. "Don't bother. There's more than half a flask left over there."

But Cheng Ke-chang picked up his empty flask and slowly walked out.

Chen Sung-lin and Li Chi-kang chatted for a while, and the conversation turned to the subject of the *Comet.* Chen said he had read a few copies and thought it was well-edited.

"It's very difficult to improve it," said Li Chi-kang, pensively. "If we had money to subscribe to some publications and buy some theoretical books for reference, we could do a much better job."

Chen Sung-lin smiled, "Have you read any of the publications from Shanghai and Hongkong?"

"Not recently," said Li Chi-kang. "I used to read *Literary Collections,* published in Shanghai. It's quite good. . . . I was recently given a copy of *The White-Haired Girl,* I found it very moving."

"I've read it too. It made me realize how the old society turns people into ghosts and the new one turns ghosts into people." Chen Sung-lin suddenly asked: "Would you like to read some Hongkong and Shanghai publications?"

Li Chi-kang flushed and said apologetically: "I can't get hold of any."

"I can," Chen Sung-lin whispered as he pulled out a copy of *Era* and handed it to him. "Be careful, don't let anyone see it!" he cautioned.

"Of course!" Li Chi-kang clasped Chen Sung-lin's hand in a firm grip. "I appreciate this very much."

Chen Sung-lin felt the copy of *Forward* which was in his pocket. Fu Chih-kao had told him that he could let Li Chi-kang

read it, but he did not take it out as he was in no hurry to offer too much at one time.

Li Chi-kang rolled up the copy of *Era,* unbuttoned his blue cloth gown and put it in an inside pocket, a pocket in which Chen Sung-lin glimpsed some pink typing paper. So Li Chi-kang had already got a copy of *Forward*! He needn't pass him one. Li Chi-kang looked up suddenly, and became aware that Chen Sung-lin was staring at his pocket. He immediately readjusted his gown, and seemed momentarily at a loss for words. After a pause he said earnestly:

"Chen Sung-lin, thank you for your concern, but it's very dangerous for you to carry those Hongkong and Shanghai periodicals around. You had better be more careful. . . ." He hesitated, then continued: "You'd better not bring them to me regularly."

Chen Sung-lin felt that now there was more mutual understanding and affection between them.

Hua Wei had now returned and was standing in the doorway.

"Chen Sung-lin, let's go to lunch," he called. Nodding to Li Chi-kang, he led Chen Sung-lin towards the refectory.

There was a tinge of rebuke in Hua Wei's voice as he said:

"Chen Sung-lin, why do you carry out your activities in the university so recklessly?"

Chen Sung-lin was about to explain when a girl walked up to them. She wore a blue, high-necked slit-skirt dress and a short coat. Her bobbed hair framed a dimpled, smiling face. On seeing Chen Sung-lin, she playfully raised her schoolbag as if to hit him and said with a merry laugh:

"You never look me up when you come to the school, Chen Sung-lin! Why didn't you come to my aid when those secret agents tried to intimidate us in front of the office?"

Chen Sung-lin looked at her in surprise. "How did you know I was there?"

"If you don't want people to know what you do, don't do it!" Cheng Yao smiled and winked at Hua Wei, who couldn't suppress a laugh.

"All right, stop fooling. Let's go to lunch now!"

She handed a roll of bills to Hua Wei, saying, "I've had mine already. I'm going home now. Take this, it's the donations for the workers at the Artillery Plant. I've just received them."

"Give my greetings to the manager of the plant," Chen Sung-lin said, staring at the money.

"Why, of course, and also to Yu Hsin-chiang!" Cheng Yao laughed, turned to Hua Wei and stretched out a dainty hand. "Where's that thing you promised me?"

Hua Wei glanced around and seeing that no one was about, handed her a folded sheet of pink typing paper. Cheng Yao deftly slipped it into her bag with which she waved to Chen Sung-lin.

"Goodbye!"

She was off in a flash, and had vanished almost before the echo of her laughter had died away.

3

THE little ferryboat chug-chugged slowly across the river, toiling bravely against the choppy waves, but looking as if it would never reach the bank.

The landing was crowded with people waiting to cross. Cheng Yao queuing behind an old lady sometimes stamped her feet impatiently and at other times stood on tiptoe, head thrust forward. She saw a long queue stretching in front of her up to the ferry landing. Two men with dark glasses, cigarettes dangling from their lips, were gesticulating and apparently giving orders, and she wondered who they were. She did not remember seeing them on previous crossings. She asked herself: It wasn't summer yet — why did they wear those ridiculous dark glasses? Could they be secret agents? Her doubts were not unfounded. As soon as the ferry reached the landing, the two fellows began to search the passengers as they embarked. Involuntarily, Cheng Yao pressed her bag close to her, as if it were a treasure someone might try to grab. After what seemed ages to her, it was her turn to step on the ferry. The old lady in front of her had bound feet and as she stepped on the swaying gangplank, she nearly lost her balance. With swift inspiration Cheng Yao stepped forward to help her.

"Hurry up," snapped one of the fellows in dark glasses.

Cheng Yao darted a glance at the secret agent, and helped the old lady over the gangplank. Other passengers soon crowded up behind her. The secret agents allowed Cheng Yao and the old lady to pass, then stopped some workers behind her and proceeded to search them.

Once across the river, Cheng Yao swiftly climbed the hill. She was panting, her chemise damp with perspiration, and her

back felt chilly in the breeze. She wiped the beads of sweat from her forehead and kept on climbing until the familiar smokestacks came in view. Home at last! With a final spurt she reached the top of the incline, glancing at the site of the recent fire, where rows of little houses were nearing completion. These were the new homes for the Artillery Plant workers. Turning a corner, she stepped through the factory gates, on which was a signboard reading: Repair Plant of the Yangtze Ordnance Works.

The factory was silent, as on the last few occasions when Cheng Yao had gone home. She missed the clanging of metal and the low throbbing of the electric motors. She quickly dismissed the thought, ran towards a small grey brick house and made straight for the first floor calling: "Mum, where's my brother?"

She peeped through his bedroom window, then rushed into her mother's room.

"Ah, so here you are. Sit down and have a drink. You are all in a sweat," said her mother, picking up a washbasin. "I'll get some water for you to wash your face."

"Where's my brother?"

"He came back from a meeting at the works some time ago and then went to the office."

"The workers at all the factories are on strike. What's the use of holding meetings at the armament works?" said Cheng Yao running out of the room.

"You imp, what's got into you?" her mother chided her affectionately. "Cheng Yao, come back and wash your face!"

"I'm going to see my brother!" Cheng Yao called back without even turning her head. She ran round a corner right into Yu Hsin-chiang. Clasping his hands in joyous greeting, she exclaimed: "Yu Hsin-chiang, the new houses on the site of the fire are nearly finished. I'll go and help carry bricks tomorrow. Will you come too? Our university is collecting money for the plant workers. Don't you think it's splendid?"

Yu Hsin-chiang just smiled. "Tell me what's going on at the factory," she said. "My schoolmates are all dying to hear about it!"

"All right, I will, but go and see your brother first. He's over there in the office." Cheng Yao released him and started to run in the direction of the office, but had not gone far when she suddenly wheeled around and as if sharing a secret said: "Chen Sung-lin sends you his greetings. I must say, you two are as alike as a pair of drumsticks at the city temple!"

After supper, Cheng Yao took her brother by the arm and together they walked out of the dining-room. Cheng Kang was broad of shoulder, square-faced and of medium build, honest eyes looked out under a broad forehead. He wore a brown leather jacket and wide blue serge trousers tucked into black leather boots. Around his neck was a purple scarf which seemed to emphasize the pallor of his face. Brother and sister walked arm in arm to the verandah, and stood there looking into the distance. Their home faced the Chialing River and commanded a beautiful view. Cheng Yao loved this spot. Whenever she was home, she would come here with her brother and talk to him about what was going on at the university. The setting sun threw a golden sheen over the green waters of the river, but Cheng Yao was in no mood to look at the view. She was anxious to talk with her brother.

"Brother, stop looking at the river and listen to me!"

Cheng Kang was gazing at the distant red cliffs, the site of the famous Red Crag Village, where the offices of the Chinese Communist Party had been in the past.

"Go ahead," he said, still gazing at the cliffs.

"Brother, I'm talking to you! Many of my schoolmates are leaving soon. . . ."

Cheng Kang suddenly turned around and looked thoughtfully at his sister. A pair of lovely eyes above a straight and shapely nose gazed back at him. Cheng Kang suddenly realized that the fledgeling had grown into a stormy petrel, ready to plunge

into flight at the sound of spring thunder. With a twinge of emotion, he stared at his young sister.

"It's true! They are going to the countryside and are setting out immediately!" Her eyes were shining. She yearned to go with her other schoolmates and join the peasant uprisings and the armed struggles. She wanted to join the guerillas fighting in the mountains and play her part in wiping out the reactionaries. She wanted to live the romantic life of a fighter! Her brother did not answer. Her eyes dimmed and her voice grew troubled as she said in more sober tones:

"I'm sure you're going to say I'm too young and ignorant and that you won't let me go." Cheng Kang's face did not betray his feelings as he thought of his sister's dreams and hopes. He understood and was in no hurry to comment.

"Three have gone from my class and more will soon be leaving. . . . How I hope. . . ."

"Hope is one thing, illusion another. . . ."

Cheng Yao looked at her brother, then turned in disappointment to gaze at the shimmering waves of the river, wondering why he gave her such a vague answer. She was yearning for a new life, not an illusion. . . .

"I'll consider the matter and we'll talk about it again," Cheng Kang answered finally, giving his sister a glimmer of hope. After a pause he asked whether the students were still on strike at the university.

"I was just about to tell you." Cheng Yao's spirits rose again. "The school has already been forced to expel the spy Wei Chi-po and to guarantee the safety of all faculty members and students. I hear that the Ministry of Education has sent a telegram, inquiring into the matter. You may be sure that has given the university authorities a headache."

"The Ministry of Education?" Cheng Kang smiled. "Just what do you think the Ministry of Education will inquire into? Have you been sending out letters and telegrams to spread the news?"

His sister nodded. "The students' association sent a report to the Shanghai newspapers and they published it. This upset the police who were scared the unrest would spread so they hurriedly wrote a letter: '. . . the aforesaid student secretly informed on his schoolmates from purely personal motives. . . .' They even had the cheek to declare 'we have not the slightest intention of interfering in university affairs. . . .' The hell they haven't! They still have not produced that Wei Chi-po. They said, 'We have investigated and our department has no knowledge of such a person; as soon as we discover his whereabouts we will inform you by letter. . . .'" She had suddenly remembered something, and exclaimed: "Oh, but where's my bag?" As she rushed off to get it, her brother asked:

"Where are you going?"

"To get my bag. I have something to show you."

Cheng Yao soon returned and with an air of mystery said: "I brought this especially for you. No one else may read it!"

Cheng Kang smiled and stretched out his hand for it, but Cheng Yao put both hands on the bag and would only let him have the paper on one condition:

"You must read it at once and give it back to me. I have to return it to him tomorrow. . . ."

". . . To him? Who is he?" Cheng Kang asked with a smile.

A blush spread over Cheng Yao's face, and her head dropped. Cheng Kang seized her schoolbag and laughingly began to rummage in it.

"You little devil, what are you hiding from me? I'll find out your secret!"

Cheng Yao's face reddened as she reached out to snatch her bag back.

"Give it to me!"

But Cheng Kang had already fished out a folded sheet of pink paper, closely mimeographed. He unfolded it, the word "Forward" in bright red at the top of the page caught his eye at once.

Cheng Kang read slowly, his face darkened as he asked:

"Why did you bring this here?"

"For you to read."

Cheng Kang shook his head. "Who told you to bring it here?" His sister could see no reason for the reproachful tone of voice, and looked at him in bewilderment. She felt as if a bucket of cold water had been poured over her, dousing her enthusiasm. But she stood there defiantly, unwilling to give ground.

Cheng Kang pointed to the sheet of pink paper and said:

"If anyone finds out that you brought this home, there'll be the devil to pay! Don't ever do such a thing again."

His sister retorted in a deeply aggrieved voice: "But nothing has happened to me!"

"You're much too foolhardy," Cheng Kang remonstrated quietly but firmly. "That isn't bravery, it's recklessness. Didn't you see secret agents everywhere, at the railway station, at the wharf, searching for copies of *Forward*?"

It infuriated the already excited Cheng Yao to see her brother so cool and matter-of-fact.

"Dangerous? Foolhardy? No wonder people say that you've changed since you've become manager! You — you haven't the courage to meet your old friends any more! You are timid, you are frightened, you . . . all right, all right! I won't get you into trouble . . . !"

Burning tears ran down her face. She had thought so highly of her brother, had such respect for him. But now . . . ? She felt sad. She snatched the copy of *Forward* out of his hands, tore it into shreds, thrust the scraps into her bag, spun round and ran back into the house.

Cheng Kang somewhat taken aback thought that maybe he had been too harsh with his sister, but on second thought he felt that his severity was justified. In slightly milder tones he called Cheng Yao to come back. Ignoring him, she rushed into her own room and slammed the door. Throwing herself on the bed, she sobbed wildly. . . .

Cheng Kang remained unperturbed, pondered for a few moments, and then went to his sister's room. He knocked at the door, and waited a while. She did not answer, and as it was not yet the time to explain his action, he turned around and went back to his own room.

It was already late at night, but Cheng Kang could not get to sleep. He lay on his bed, head pillowed on his arms, troubled by his sister's words. She seemed to have changed since the last time she had been home. She was now reading the *Forward.* Did that mean she had closer contact with the underground organization? He realized that his sister had grown up and was about to plunge into the torrent of revolution. She was still young, innocent, and ignorant about the way to carry on the struggle. She was somewhat headstrong, he reflected, but she could be tempered in the strain and stress of struggle. She would learn and mature quickly.

While thinking about his sister, he recalled many past events. His family had arrived in Szechuan as refugees during the early stages of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. His father died in 1943 and he had been compelled to leave school. He found a clerical job in the general affairs department of the Yangtze Ordnance Works. The works were tightly controlled by the Kuomintang reactionaries, and Cheng Kang's eyes were soon opened to the decadence and corruption of the old society. He realized that the high-ranking officials, dressed in American military uniforms, were spending most of their time speculating on the stock-market, pulling strings, grafting and hoarding, living on the sweat of the people and sucking their blood. He developed a deep loathing for the whole set-up. Most of the office staff were slick characters, whose day's work was almost limited to reading the papers, gossiping, commenting on films and women. . . . There were a few women working in the office, but they rarely showed up, except on pay-day. They were women with bad reputations who had secured their positions through their family connections.

A few days after his first pay-day, one of these glamour girls began to come to work punctually and regularly. She would sit opposite to Cheng Kang and knit, pausing every few lines to look up and make eyes at Cheng Kang.

"Hey, youngster, you're a newcomer, aren't you? I hope the Evening in Paris perfume on my hair doesn't bother you?" "Cheng Kang, do you like a woman to use lipstick?" and so on. Once, she actually perched herself on his desk stretching out her tapered red-lacquered nails, and simpered:

"Please help me cut my nails." Cheng Kang had glared at this empty-headed parasite and said disdainfully:

"What do you think you are doing, Miss! Have some self-respect!"

Two years passed in this foul atmosphere, but Cheng Kang was not lonely because he had friends: progressive former schoolmates and members of the factory workers' reading club. They often gathered to read the *Hsinhua Daily*, discuss current events, and take part in progressive activities.

He and his friends longed to go to the liberated areas. One day, they wrote a joint letter to the *Hsinhua Daily* asking for help.

Cheng Kang was very surprised when he recognized the man who secretly brought the answering letter to his home. He was his own long-lost elder brother! Contact with him had been lost when he went to Yenan during the early stages of the War of Resistance.

Cheng Kang had clasped his brother to his breast as he inquired: "What are you doing in Chungking?"

"I was transferred to the office of the Communist Party here last year, and I now live at Red Crag Village," his brother had explained. "As soon as I arrived in Chungking, I inquired about you everywhere. The newspaper office has just forwarded this letter to me."

"I can't tell you how happy I am to see you again. But tell me," Cheng Kang could not refrain from asking, "will we be able to go to the liberated areas?"

"Well — I can't say for certain."

"Why not?" Cheng Kang could not help being surprised.

"Because people are also needed in the Kuomintang-held areas."

Cheng Kang agreed. His elder brother subsequently made arrangements for some of his friends to go.

Cheng Kang joined the Party under the sponsorship of his elder brother.

The victory of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression was followed by a wave of demobilization, and home going. Big and small officials at the armament works followed the bureaucrat-capitalists and the reactionary government to Nanking and Shanghai to make their fortunes. But the large numbers of workers who had come to the works as refugees during the war still had no means of returning to their homes. The factory reduced production, and work stoppages and lay-offs menaced their livelihood. Everywhere there was hunger and confusion.

Cheng Kang was notified that he was to assume the post of administrator at the Repair Plant attached to the armament works. It was a small plant with about three hundred workers, which had stopped production at the end of the War of Resistance. The Kuomintang reactionaries reckoned that they could get all the machinery they needed from the United States, and no longer needed this run-down factory to make it for them; as for weapons, surplus American war material was reaching the ports by the shipload and was not costing them a cent. The workers, who would not leave the plant, were sending in petitions and raising demands. The administrative office was unable to handle the situation, and for lack of a better solution pushed young Cheng Kang in to clear up the mess.

Cheng Kang reported his transfer to the Party organization, and when his elder brother learned the news he emphasized the need for Party work at the plant. The Party organization was weak there, the only member being the old master workman Hsiao. Cheng Kang was instructed to get the workers united,

resume production, and organize the struggle. Cheng Kang accepted this new task and kept the Party directives firmly in mind.

The morning Cheng Kang went to take stock of the situation at the Repair Plant he found that the place had gone to seed, the workshops were neglected and in disrepair and the grounds were overgrown with weeds. Several hundred workers and their families were crowded into tumble-down shacks held together only by ropes. They had moved there with the factory from other regions during the War of Resistance and had nowhere else to go. Since production had stopped they had been without money. These destitute unemployed workers and the piles of junk metal were the legacy left for Cheng Kang to "administrate."

Cheng Kang was deeply distressed by the misery of the workers. He loitered around the sheds, wanting to discuss things with them, but they eyed the new administrator with distrust and maintained an ominous silence — the kind which precedes a storm.

Cheng Kang stopped to read a notice board and found that protest slogans had been pasted across it.

"We want food!"

"Down with the Kuomintang reactionaries!"

Cheng Kang was surprised to find that they had been written by an unpractised hand. His heart warmed and his blood flowed faster in his veins. Alongside the slogans were a few tattered notices, yellowed with age.

> The Yangtze Ordnance Works hereby transmits order KO272 issued by the Armament Bureau of the Ministry of Defence:
>
> Insofar as the plants attached to the Ministry are military organizations, and all employees are military personnel, strikes and malingering are a breach of military discipline. Hereafter, should the afore-mentioned situations arise in any plant attached to the Ministry, production shall forthwith be suspended at the said plant, and the chief instigators dealt with by military tribunal. . . .

Cheng Kang reflected that they had threatened to close the plant if any strikes broke out, but the plant had been shut down

although there had been no strikes. His anger mounted as he continued to read the notice.

> . . . since victory, production at all plants has stopped because of lack of markets. The products of this plant are equally superfluous and it is solely due to concern felt by the Armament Bureau for the welfare of the workers that the plant has survived. . . . All employees are expected to show due regard for this order. . . .

Someone had scribbled "Rubbish" across the notice in red pencil. Beside it was yet another placard. It had been torn lengthwise leaving only a strip of paper reading:

> In reference to the temporary suspension of production at the Repair Plant, the Yangtze Ordnance Works of the Ministry of Defence hereby. . . .

Below this someone had scrawled in chalk:

"This plant must not close down. Start production now!"

The workers slowly gathered around. Cheng Kang turned around to face the silent menacing crowd which was now pressing in on him. Some had angrily raised clenched fists and they all were silent. One stockily-built young worker, jacket open and arms akimbo, asked accusingly:

"Are you the administrator? I ask you, is the plant going into operation or not?"

Cheng Kang did not answer.

Another worker, thin and weak from malnutrition, came forward a few steps and looking absolutely desperate he said:

"Administrator, we've sold all our possessions, we've no money even for food. . . ."

"My child is ill. Please advance me some money so that I can buy medicine. . . ."

Every face was filled with the anger born of starvation.

"Victory? Hell! What kind of victory is this?"

"Damn them, they got rich on the war and now they've gone to get richer on confiscated property, but I can't even go home. . . ."

The young worker who had first spoken, shook his fist as he shouted: "Dismantle the factory and sell everything!"

"Sell the machines!" The thought flashed through Cheng Kang's head, but then he hesitated. How long could one keep several hundred workers alive on the proceeds?

"Sell them? Who wants those old broken-down machines?" protested an old worker. "Yu Hsin-chiang's idea is no good. If we sell them we'll have even less chance of making a living!"

As he spoke, he pushed his way close to Cheng Kang and demanded:

"Are you or aren't you going to pay us?"

The workers' militant spirit made Cheng Kang's heart sing, but he could not reveal his feeling here.

"Damn him, he doesn't answer, he's pretending to be deaf! Hit the bastard!" shouted the enraged Yu Hsin-chiang, his unbuttoned jacket revealing his sunburnt chest.

"Let's beat him up!" Several young workers rushed forward with a yell, brandishing their fists. Among them was the young, stockily-built Chen Sung-lin, a pal of Yu Hsin-chiang's.

"Take it easy!" said Cheng Kang, waving his hand. Then he addressed them in a loud voice: "Brother workers, listen to me! I'm in the same position as you, I can't go home either! Neither you nor I are getting rich on the country or on confiscated property! We are all down-trodden people, but we have to go on living and we want to live like human beings! We workers. . . ."

"Cut the gab! We want to start work immediately. Do you agree or not?" came the retort from Yu, echoed by the little round-faced fellow.

"Start work immediately!" A hundred voices took up the cry. Cheng Kang found it difficult to control himself in front of this threatening mass of workers. In loud deliberate tones he said:

"I entirely agree that we must resume work without delay!"

The uproar died down. A glimmer of hope appeared on the faces of some of the workers. Others sneered in disbelief.

The old worker made a proposal: "We'll collect orders for work ourselves. What do you say?"

"A good idea. Let's act on Master Hsiao's idea. We'll go out and pick up orders ourselves," another worker added, his eyes challenging Cheng Kang.

Master Workman Hsiao saw that Cheng Kang was not clear in his mind about this proposal. He continued: "Administrator, the watt-hour meter wasn't dismantled when the work in the plant stopped. Doesn't the Yangtze Ordnance Works have to pay a basic electricity charge for such a large kilowatt-hour meter?"

Cheng Kang said, "Yes, it does!" Having worked in the general affairs office, he knew that a basic charge had to be paid even if no electricity was used.

"Well, as long as the electricity we use is covered by the basic charge, we won't have to pay anything. . . . If we can get orders ourselves and start work I guarantee that we can keep the plant going."

Several veteran skilled workers got into a huddle, heatedly debated the feasibility of Hsiao's proposal, and finally agreed that it was workable. Some young workers stood by listening but made no comment.

Cheng Kang also listened attentively, and as the discussion proceeded, it became clear what Master Hsiao had in mind. He saw that this would solve the problem of finances which had been bothering him. He watched Hsiao intently, wondering whether this old worker was the Comrade Hsiao his elder brother had mentioned.

Cheng Kang's spirits rose and he asked: "Can production go ahead on these old machines?"

"It can," replied Master Hsiao, warming up to Cheng Kang's affable manner. "After all, these were the machines we used before!"

The little round-faced fellow broke in: "Our skilled workers know their stuff. If they take charge, I'm sure our products will find a market. We could repair and assemble machines for privately-owned factories."

"If the administrator is willing to help, I'm sure we can get the plant going."

Encouraged by the spirit among the workers, Cheng Kang said enthusiastically, "Right! Let's all pull together! We'll start production, manage the plant and issue the wages ourselves!"

Cheng Kang solicited their help:

"Now let's elect a few master workmen to take charge and discuss the problem of how to get the work going. What do you all say?"

"We agree! We propose Master Workman Hsiao!" Yu Hsin-chiang seemed to be the mouthpiece for the young workers.

"Master Liu. . . ."

". . . and Master Tan."

"Count in Yu Hsin-chiang too!"

The next morning was a cloudburst, which was unusual for the mountain city of Chungking. Braving the unusually heavy downpour, Cheng Kang went barefoot to the administrative office of the ordnance works to make his report. He told them about the workers' hardships, their demand to resume work and the measures they had suggested. He asked for permission to put the plant into operation again. The director listened, and like the cunning old fox that he was, replied that no funds could be supplied, but that if they thought it possible, they could resume work. Cheng Kang was to use his own judgment, and the administrative office would not be responsible if anything went wrong. He pushed Cheng Kang's written report into a filing-cabinet without so much as a glance at it. But he had more to say, and after some hemming and hawing, declared that if production was resumed, they had to hand over 40 per cent of the monthly profits in return for his tacit consent. Boiling with rage, Cheng Kang returned to the factory and reported back to the workers. Through clenched teeth they swore:

"Those sons of bitches, they still want to sponge on us!"

"To hell with them! Let's get the machines going and settle with them later!"

The work of putting the plant into condition proceeded with feverish intensity. Under the direction of the master workmen, the machinery was overhauled, an inventory taken of raw materials, rubbish cleared out, and the whole place swept out. In spite of the heavy rain, groups of workers were set to repair the leaking roofs.

Everyone seemed to have gained a new lease on life. Although the wind and rain did not abate, in a few hours everything was in order. Raw materials were enough to last for at least a year or two. All the machines were in good condition except for one vital motor which they couldn't get to run. After discussion it was decided to use the relief money given by the workers at nearby plants to have it repaired. The money pooled was still insufficient, so the hungry workers dug into their own pockets for their last few dollars.

The rain continued as if all the flood-gates of heaven had been opened.

Cheng Kang, Master Hsiao and young Chen Sung-lin took the motor to an electrical engineering repair shop in the city. Hungry and cold, they waited all day until the job was done at dusk. They carefully carried it to the river bank, only to find that the wharf had been submerged beneath the flood waters. The river was still rising, and neither the paddle-ferry nor the wooden dinghies could cross. It was not even certain that they would be able to cross the next day, and with the Chialing River rising and rain still falling, the ferry service would not be resumed for many days.

Meanwhile, hundreds of workers and their families were impatiently waiting at the factory for the return of the men with the motor. The three talked and talked the matter over but could see no way out, except risking a crossing. They could not allow the workers at the plant to go on being hungry day after day!

Finally, they found a boatman, who, after much pleading on their part, was willing to risk ferrying them across. They carried the motor to his little boat. As he grasped the tiller, his eyes

scanned the turbulent waters, "I'm not sure whether we can make it or not. The waves are very high. . . ."

Cheng Kang and the other two took turns at the oars, as the small craft fought its way through the torrent. It tossed and pitched, huge waves crashing over the bow and flooding the little craft. The old boatman shouted: "Steady now!"

Suddenly a mountainous wave rose and roared towards them. It seemed as if all the flood waters of the river were bearing down upon the boat, threatening to engulf them. The wave broke over them and swept them several hundred feet out of their way. They were all soaked, and water dripped down inside their clothes. The boat was awash with muddy, brown water.

Darkness came gradually and the small craft drifted on the dark troubled waters. Battling with the raging waves for over an hour had drained them of their last ounce of strength, so that they could no longer row.

Suddenly the sound of shouting came across the river! The buffeting wind tore the voices to shreds, but they could make out disjointed words coming from many throats.

"Cheng Kang. . . ."

"Mas-ter — Hsiao. . . ."

"Cheng — Kang, ad-minis-trator. . . ."

There on the far bank of the river, the red glow of torches pierced the night. The workers had braved the storm to meet them!

The glow of the torches seemed to give new strength to their tired bodies and they worked with renewed energy. They shouted in reply:

"We're — coming."

A little boat loomed up on the dark surface of the river. Yu Hsin-chiang and a few tough young workers had come to meet their comrades. . . .

The factory resumed production.

Thick billows of smoke belched forth from the smokestacks.

Showers of sparks were thrown up by the dazzling streams of molten iron flowing into the moulds in the workshops. Perspiring workers operated whirling lathes, smiles lighting up their toil-worn faces. The main office soon learned that the Repair Plant was making a profit, and could not but praise Cheng Kang for his able management. The director of the ordnance works broke precedent by appointing him first acting manager and then manager of the Repair Plant.

The Party organization in the factory also grew. Yu Hsin-chiang and Master Workman Tan were accepted as members, and a Party branch was set up with Master Workman Hsiao as secretary. Then Chen Sung-lin and two other old workers joined the Party, adding to its strength. Later, Hsiao and some other workers were transferred to the Artillery Plant after its expansion, and Yu Hsin-chiang succeeded to the post of secretary of the Party branch. Cheng Kang was directed to operate individually, maintaining only a single contact with his immediate superior, and although he was deeply concerned about the activities of the workers at the plant, he strictly observed Party discipline and severed organizational contact with the plant's branch.

The political situation in the country deteriorated day by day. At the instigation of U.S. imperialism, Chiang Kai-shek tore up the Political Consultative Conference* agreements in total disregard of the wishes of the nation. He then openly attacked the liberated areas, and Cheng Kang's elder brother and the other Party functionaries in Red Crag Village were forced to withdraw to Yenan.

Cheng Kang's link with the Party was thus abruptly severed. He was deeply distressed at this but observing strict discipline, he did not attempt to contact anyone on his own initiative and

* The Conference attended by representatives of the Communist Party of China, the Kuomintang and other political parties, and personages without party affiliation was held in Chungking from January 10 to 31, 1946. The Conference adopted five resolutions which were in varying degrees favourable to the people and unfavourable to Chiang Kai-shek's reactionary rule.

anxiously waited for the Party to contact him. It was more than a month later that a middle-aged stranger came to visit him. The man was tall and thin, gaunt of face and with deeply-etched lines on his forehead. His deep-set eyes radiated warmth and strength of character. The visitor seemed familiar with Cheng Kang's home, and greeted him informally. He handed him a folded slip of paper, explaining: "This is a note which your elder brother asked me to give to you."

Cheng Kang hastened to unfold it and to read the few terse sentences written in his brother's familiar handwriting:

> "I have reached home safely and am working in the army. All is well, do not worry. I'm convinced that after you receive this letter, you will return to the embrace of our most beloved. I wish you everlasting happiness!"

"You? . . ." Cheng Kang stared at his visitor, his lips quivering.

"Comrade Cheng has explained everything in the letter." The visitor gazed warmly at Cheng Kang.

"Ah! You have come at last!" Cheng Kang clasped the visitor to his bosom, tears of emotion welling up in his eyes. "I've been waiting so long."

Their hands met in a firm grip. "We have known about you ever since you set up the workers' reading club. . . . The Party considers you a good comrade."

"I have done so little for the Party!"

"The underground Party organization has decided to resume contact with you. You are returning to the Party's embrace!"

Cheng Kang's heart was full to overflowing, as he heard his visitor say: "The enemy cannot destroy our Party. Red Crag Village has left us the seeds of revolution and the tradition of struggle. The Party's cause will go forward!"

He thought that some day he would tell his visitor how at dusk every day he had gazed across the Chialing River at the distant Red Crag Village, looked longingly at the red cliffs near the Communist Party office, and hoped that on the next day or the day after, the Party would surely send someone!

"My name is Hsu Yun-feng. I've been looking forward to meeting you. The Party has decided that you should help me in my work." After a pause he added in a low voice: "Are you willing to do so?"

"Of course I am, so long as it's work for the Party!"

After that Cheng Kang became message-bearer for Comrade Hsu. At his suggestion, Cheng Kang stopped all his political activities at the plant, so that his social position as manager could provide a better cover for the carrying out of his new Party task.

As they worked together, Cheng Kang came to greatly admire this man, with his ardour and his iron will. His wide forehead and clear, deep-set eyes betokened a man with a mind striving to investigate and comprehend. For him no difficulties were insurmountable, no problems insoluble. He often changed his guise but his clothes were always simple, as if he had no time for trivialities. In contrast he showed the most minute concern for his comrades.

Cheng Kang knew very little about Hsu Yun-feng's past. He'd heard that he came from a worker's family, had been a fitter at the Yangtze Ordnance Works for several years, and knew practically all the workers at the plants. He toiled untiringly in the interests of his class-brothers and whenever he learned of labour struggles at any of the plants, he would go to counsel and help the workers, regardless of his own need for rest. His noble qualities were like a beacon to Cheng Kang, who grew in strength and experience, and tried to follow in his footsteps. Six months later, however, Cheng Kang was transferred to other Party work. After that he had little contact with Hsu Yun-feng. He took the separation very hard.

One day, a woman comrade came to Cheng Kang's home at a prearranged time and greeted him with a password. She was a poised and steady young woman of medium height who could not have been more than thirty and was dressed simply but well in a blue gown. She seated herself and calmly introduced herself to Cheng Kang.

"My name is Chiang, Chiang Hsueh-chin. . . . As I am slightly older than you, please call me Sister Chiang."

The warmth in her voice stirred him and he repeated: "Sister Chiang!"

"Do you regularly read *Attack* — the publication of the municipal Party committee? Have you any opinions on it or suggestions?" she asked him.

"*Attack*? I have read the first twenty-one numbers. It is excellent. I don't think I have any suggestions to offer." As he was talking to her, an idea which had troubled him for a long time came back to him.

"The workers at the plant were very upset when the *Hsinhua Daily* was compelled to suspend publication. They long for news from the Party and want to know more about the War of Liberation. *Attack,* however, is an inner-Party publication to which the masses have no access. Can some way be found to satisfy their needs?"

"That is a good idea," said Sister Chiang nodding and smiling. "The municipal Party committee has been considering this question for a long time, and has decided to issue a publication for the masses, in order to give the people news about the successes of the revolution. It is to be called *Forward* and will appear once a week. Its emphasis will be on reporting the progress of the War of Liberation, commenting on the situation and expounding on the Party's policies and decrees. . . . It will be issued to reliable activists, and the municipal committee hopes that it will become a powerful weapon with which to unite and educate the masses."

Cheng Kang's enthusiasm was aroused and he asked eagerly: "Am I to work on *Forward*?"

"Comrade Hsu told me that you probably would be interested in this kind of work. Is that right?" Sister Chiang smiled. "In school plays you were in charge of scenery and lighting. Now you will be doing backstage work again. The municipal Party committee wants to set up a secret press in your home."

"An excellent idea! This house will do very well. The enemy

is not likely to suspect me, the manager of the plant!" Cheng Kang looked earnestly at Sister Chiang. "You are probably aware of conditions at the plant. It's relatively safe here."

"Very well. From today, you are on the staff of *Forward*, and will be in charge of printing. I will look after the distribution."

Sister Chiang gave him precise and detailed instructions, and Cheng Kang realized that she was as experienced and mature as Hsu Yun-feng. How many excellent comrades there were in the Party! It was less than half an hour since they had met, but he already felt that the unpretentious and dependable Sister Chiang was worthy of his fullest confidence.

Sister Chiang looked at him kindly. She seemed to sense the young comrade's feelings.

"Comrade Cheng," she continued, "you must be aware that as a propaganda publication of the municipal committee *Forward* will have a great influence among the masses and is certain to attract the enemy's attention. You must therefore abide strictly by the principles of secret work, see as little as possible of your friends and stop all work among the masses, otherwise not only will you suffer yourself, but the Party will also be exposed to incalculable danger!" After a pause to let her words sink in she continued: "It's possible that some of your friends will misinterpret your passive attitude, but I'm confident that in the interest of the Party you will be able to stand any personal difficulties."

Cheng Kang listened silently. He saw that his new task was more complicated than his previous one as message-bearer for Hsu Yun-feng. It made much stricter demands and put greater responsibility on him; but he clasped Sister Chiang's hand in a firm grip as he declared:

"I give my pledge to the Party!"

Such solemn moments as this have been experienced by countless Communist Party members when pledging their all to the Party. Cheng Kang was deeply moved. Sister Chiang looked at him calmly and said warmly:

"The Party has great faith in you!"

The little storeroom behind his bedroom was cleared out and turned into the secret printing shop for the *Forward*. In the daytime, Cheng Kang was manager of the factory fulfilling his duties with even greater care and caution than before. At night he was the printer of the Party paper, working long hours and sometimes not going to bed.

Cheng Kang's reminiscences were interrupted by a soft knock on the door. He returned to the present and switched on the bedside lamp.

His mother pushed open the door, put a bottle of drinking water on the nearby table and remarked: "Not asleep yet? It's getting very late. You're always up late. You must go to bed earlier!"

"Is sister asleep yet?"

"She fell asleep long ago but she's quarrelling with someone in her dreams," answered his mother.

Cheng Kang saw his mother to the door, urging: "You go to sleep too, mother." He poured out a glass of water. The alarm clock ticked loudly in the quiet of the night. Cheng Kang mused for a while, the factory was silent and his mother was probably asleep by now. His drowsiness passed away. He emptied the glass, and slowly walked to the little door at the back of his bedroom. He pushed it open, switched on the electric light, then went back and switched off the bedside lamp, entered the storeroom, and locked himself in.

On the table was a home-made mimeograph, and a neat pile of pink typing paper. All thoughts of the past aroused by his sister's behaviour faded away, as with practised movements he put on an apron and gloves to avoid any tell-tale stains on fingers or clothing.

Cheng Kang opened the duplicating machine, put in a stencil, spread an even layer of ink on the roller and deftly produced the first page. . . .

The seconds and minutes flew by. One stencil finished, he

slipped in another. Working quickly he seemed more like a skilled printer than the manager of a plant.

The chilly mist gradually lifted. The distant mountain peaks showed as pale shadows in the early dawn. The rising sun was greeted by the songs of birds flying into the distance. Cheng Yao had been sitting on a rocky cliff overhanging the river for some time now. She had been tormented by dreams the previous night and had not slept well. At times it seemed that her elder brother had come back to take her to Yenan; then she saw Hua Wei covered in blood. They were in a cell together at the police H.Q., being interrogated by the secret agent Wei Chi-po. Then she dreamed that she was with Cheng Kang on a crowded ferry and the copy of *Forward* had been discovered. She had hidden it in various places, but for some reason or other, it always reappeared in her schoolbag. A secret agent wearing dark glasses was chasing her around the ferry, when she awoke.

She had felt very unsettled lately. She longed to be part of the great struggle, but was bewildered and confused and very excitable. Her anger against her brother had now melted like ice in the spring sunshine and she was soon as serene as the morning. Earlier on she had tiptoed to her brother's window and peeped in. He was snoring, the bedclothes drawn over his head. She had tapped lightly, but he had not awakened. . . . Cheng Yao was feeling sorry and ashamed of herself. She remembered how she had clasped her schoolbag tightly, fearful lest the secret agents should search her, yet she had called her brother a coward. She flushed as she realized what her brother said had been correct — recklessness was not bravery. She thought of past events: It was her brother who had told her about the Eighth Route Army in the War of Resistance, and it was her brother who, when she had only just learned to make her own pigtails, had told her about the guerillas behind the enemy lines, about Chairman Mao at Yenan. . . . She had just entered senior high school when her brother returned late one night. As soon as he came into the house he quietly told

her that at a meeting of the Sino-Soviet Literary Association held at Feilai Temple, he saw Chairman Mao and Vice-Chairman Chou En-lai pass in front of him. They were waving their greetings to the workers. He momentarily forgot the presence of the secret agents among the crowd and shouted: "Long live Chairman Mao!" He told his experience with great emotion.

Then there was that time when her brother had returned very late one night, his face smeared with blood — she forgot what had been the explanation — but she remembered that her brother had told her not to make a fuss and had sworn her to secrecy. He had cleaned off the blood and dirt and gone to work as usual the next day, explaining his bruises by saying that he had fallen and hurt himself in the dark. Then another incident, hardly anything out of the ordinary, occurred to her and made her heart beat faster. It happened on her brother's birthday, the noodles were cooked and he had not returned and her mother said: "Humph! I suppose he's in the workshop again!" There she had found him, covered with grease, among the workers. On the way home, she had happily commented: "Brother, how much like a worker you are! No wonder everyone says that although you are the manager of the plant, you don't put on any airs." Brother's expression suddenly clouded and he was never again seen with the workers.

Cheng Yao suddenly jumped down from the rocky ledge. Wasn't she also being secretive? Hadn't she deliberately refrained from telling her brother that she had joined the New Democratic Youth Association? As she thought over this, she understood many things for the first time. Her brother must, like herself, be taking part in some organized activity, and be carrying out a secret task! Maybe like the eldest brother he too was a courageous Communist Party member?

The early morning ferryboat had crossed the river and eased up to the landing stage. Its siren gave two blasts, and it was on its way back again. This reminded Cheng Yao of the time and she thought that her brother must surely be awake by now. Perhaps he was waiting for her. She'd better go home.

When she returned to the plant, Cheng Yao noticed a woman in a high-necked blue gown following her through the gates. She thought this strange, and wondered whom she was coming to visit so early. Both of them stopped at the front door of her home as if by mutual arrangement.

The stranger smiled and asked: "Are you Cheng Yao?"

"Yes. How do you know me?" Cheng Yao looked at her curiously.

"Your brother told me about you." The woman's voice was warm and pleasant, as she introduced herself, "My name is Chiang. I have come to see him."

Cheng Yao was attracted by her unassuming, natural manner, and she couldn't help noticing that her warm smile was just like that of an elder sister. It suddenly occurred to her that this must be a comrade who had come to see her brother on a special mission. She quickly asked her to come in.

Her brother's bedroom door was still shut, so he was probably still in bed. Cheng Yao rapped loudly at the door.

"Brother, get up quickly, there's someone to see you!"

She was excited and curious, feeling that she would soon know all her brother's secrets.

The door opened and Cheng Kang appeared, rubbing his bloodshot eyes.

"Didn't you sleep well last night?" she asked, her excitement turned to a feeling of guilt.

"I slept very well, thank you," Cheng Kang replied with a smile. "Who is it?"

"A woman by the name of Chiang. . . ."

"Ah, Sister Chiang has come. Please tell her to come in."

Before Cheng Kang had finished making his bed, Sister Chiang stepped into his room. Cheng Yao noticed her brother's suppressed excitement, and was certain that she had guessed right. The visitor was her brother's comrade! She got some hot tea for Sister Chiang and slipped out again, turned to leave the room, looking back wistfully, as if hoping to see something extraordinary in Sister Chiang.

"You're early today, Sister Chiang," said Cheng Kang as soon as his sister had left. Sister Chiang seated herself on the edge of the bed, and asked:

"Did you work all night again?"

"No, I slept for two hours," said Cheng Kang, pouring out water to wash his face.

"I wanted to have a long talk with you so I came early."

One could sense from Sister Chiang's voice that she was in a happy frame of mind. She had been busy arranging to hand over her duties before she went. So she had not seen Cheng Kang for some days.

"Sister Chiang, you must have been very busy recently. . . . I've been wanting to talk with you."

"That's just why I came," replied Sister Chiang with a smile.

"Very well," Cheng Kang began after a moment's pause. "It's about *Forward*. . . ."

Sister Chiang nodded and said: "Go ahead."

"In my opinion it's not a very good arrangement for one person to cut the stencils and another to do the duplicating. It would be better to combine the two jobs and let one person be responsible for them both."

"Has this been on your mind for some time?"

Cheng Kang was gratified at Sister Chiang's interest in the proposal. He had been turning over the idea in his mind for some weeks, but every time Sister Chiang had visited him recently she had been in a hurry, and there had been no opportunity to discuss it. He soon came to the point:

"In my opinion, it has two advantages. First, one more person will be available for other Party work, second, one person less on this particular job means one less chance of exposure. The fewer the people involved, the safer. . . ." Actually, Cheng Kang had also a third reason. His first attempt at duplicating had been a failure because he had accidentally torn the stencil. He then thought that no matter how skilful he became at duplicating he would always have his heart in his mouth if he did not know how to cut stencils. He made up his mind to learn how

to do it, and was now quite expert. He could now write block characters in neat Sung Dynasty style.

Sister Chiang raised her eyebrows questioningly: "And to whom do you think this work should be given?"

"Me. I've learned how to cut stencils." Cheng Kang took a sheet of stencil paper covered with meticulous writing out of the drawer. "This is some of my handiwork."

"I guessed that you had another reason. I'll bet you thought of it when you tore the stencil the first time you tried to duplicate."

Cheng Kang laughed, as he thought that Sister Chiang was sharp and had seen through him.

"You are quite right," continued Sister Chiang. "Your other reasons — economizing on manpower and guaranteeing secrecy — are both valid. As you know, many of our comrades have recently been withdrawn from the cities to strengthen the Party work in the countryside. It's not convenient to have several people working on *Forward*.... But I was worried about your health and thought it would not stand up to the strain, so I never came to a definite decision. . . ."

Cheng Kang thumped himself on the chest, "Just look at me! I'm not thirty yet. I'm in the prime of life!"

Sister Chiang couldn't help laughing, but was soon serious again. She continued:

"Don't you ever know what it is to be tired? Your tasks will grow heavier and you must take care of your health. We have many days of hard work ahead of us yet! Our generation has to overthrow Chiang Kai-shek and build a new China with our own hands. Your youth and energy will be as much needed then as they are today!"

Sister Chiang's words seemed to give Cheng Kang a glimpse of the future.

"Sister Chiang, none of us will get old! How I wish I could fight forever shoulder to shoulder with you, with Hsu Yun-feng and all our other comrades!" After a moment's hesitation, he continued pensively: "I may not live to see that day, but

regardless of what may happen to me, I am firmly convinced that communism will be victorious! More and more people will awaken and fight in its cause!"

The two comrades-in-arms sat silent, each conscious of the deep understanding between them.

Cheng Kang's mother tapped lightly on the door and brought in some more tea. She greeted the visitor cordially, inviting her to stay for breakfast. Sister Chiang nodded acceptance. When Cheng Kang's mother had gone, Sister Chiang turned to another subject. "Your sister has recently been accepted by the Youth Association. I have a good impression of her, although she is still somewhat childish."

"She's extremely headstrong and has many petty-bourgeois traits."

"Don't be too impatient. Bourgeois school-life and the influences of the old society inevitably leave their mark on people's characters. Can we ourselves claim that we have remained untainted? If properly led and taught, the young generation will quickly mature in the struggle! Cheng Kang, do you know that your sister is in love?"

"She sees a lot of Hua Wei at the university."

Sister Chiang nodded. "Hua Wei is an excellent young man. Have you ever met him?"

Cheng Kang shook his head. "She's too shy to bring him home."

"Hua Wei will be leaving the university very soon. Your sister also wants to go to the countryside and has sent in several requests, but they have been turned down. Hua Wei's departure will make her very unhappy. You must do all you can to help her with her personal problems. . . ."

"It wouldn't be a bad idea for her to go to the countryside and discipline herself. Is there any possibility?"

"The struggle in the countryside is very acute at present. When the situation improves, we'll let her go."

Sister Chiang paused and again changed the subject. "I'd

like to talk over another matter with you. Cheng Kang, why don't you get your mother a good daughter-in-law?"

Cheng Kang laughed. "I've no time for love at the moment."

"Oh?" Sister Chiang seemed surprised. "And why not?"

"It would hamper my work."

"I don't think it would be bound to."

"In theory, I think that falling in love need not necessarily hamper work, and might even inspire young people with courage and enthusiasm for the struggle. But I have seen people fall in love, get married and soon get completely absorbed in narrow domesticity. They abandoned the revolution and its ideals for the sake of a few paltry 'comforts' and 'happiness'. . . ."

"There's a certain truth in what you say. In these troubled times some people do cast aside their ideals for trivial personal considerations. But what you say is not entirely correct. Think of the great revolutionary leaders, Marx and Lenin. . . . There were deep and strong bonds of affection between Marx and his wife Jenny. Theirs was the love of revolutionaries, wasn't it?"

"Nevertheless, there's the question of family life, especially for a woman comrade. . . ."

"I'm a woman comrade. I have a lovely child, but he doesn't prevent me from doing my work."

"I'll wait until after the liberation before I decide this matter," replied Cheng Kang.

"I like your serious attitude, but think it is rather extreme," said Sister Chiang. "I've talked too much today. But the comrades, including Hsu Yung-feng, are all concerned about you. . . . Why I particularly wanted to raise this personal matter with you is because our ways will be parting."

"Why is that?"

"I have been transferred and will soon leave for the countryside. Please let me have the copies of *Forward* which you printed last night."

"Who will give me my instructions?"

"Comrade Li Ching-yuan. The municipal Party committee

places great importance on *Forward* and henceforth a high-ranking comrade will advise you directly." Sister Chiang smiled as she grasped Cheng Kang's hand: "I was just wondering who I could find to take over one of my jobs. Now you have snatched it right out of my hands!"

With a sudden realization, Cheng Kang raised Sister Chiang's hand and examined it. Between the index and middle fingers was the impression left by frequent use of an iron stylus. He stammered:

"So the person who cut the stencils — was you?"

Sister Chiang smiled but did not answer.

4

SISTER Chiang was nearing Heaven Worship Gate Wharf. She peered ahead, but the fog was too thick and she could only see a few feet in front of her. She stopped to adjust her headscarf.

"The fog is too dense, Miss. The boat won't sail for some time. Have a bowl of fried rice porridge?" a vendor suggested.

Sister Chiang shook her head, and after a moment's hesitation, walked in the direction of the river bank, her high heels clicking on the flagged walk. A porter carrying her small bedroll followed close behind.

From the roadside came the occasional shouts of vendors and the plaintive cries of beggars. Suddenly Sister Chiang heard a harsh-voiced command: "Step out! No straggling!" She looked around, a ghostly procession of conscripts wearing tattered uniforms shuffled wearily through the thick fog. Shivering with cold, they walked with hunched shoulders, benumbed hands hidden in their sleeves. Their cheekbones protruded sharply from emaciated faces, and their deep-sunken eyes reflectd utter hopelessness. . . .

At the river bank, the porter set down the bedroll and Sister Chiang paid him. As she stood among the waiting passengers in the clammy fog, the chilly breeze from the river whipped up the edges of her stylish overcoat. She buttoned it up, and thrust her hands into the pockets.

Sister Chiang was dressed like an elegant society lady. She looked serene, but her thoughts kept going back to the pitiful spectacle she had just seen. How much more persecution would the long-suffering peasants have to put up with? How much longer would it be before a furious tide of opposition shook

the foundations of the reactionary regime? As she stood there in the fog, she had a vision of countless red flags fluttering on a vast plain, and endless ranks of armed peasants going through the mountains. Her husband, Peng Sung-tao, was now in the mountains. Conditions there must be more favourable for his work. Her reflections reminded her of her own responsibilities. Peng Sung-tao was sure to be pleased that the Party was sending a group of comrades to northern Szechuan. It was already a year since she had seen him onto the boat at this very wharf last spring. She wondered if he still coughed blood as he did when he was in Chungking. Was he still fond of saying: "Every last spark of energy in us must go into the struggle for victory!" The child hadn't been born then, and Peng Sung-tao had predicted: "By the time we meet again, our country will be liberated and the child will be able to say 'Papa'!" He had emphasized that building communism in a huge country of several hundred million people would be an arduous job, so the child must not be spoilt. The new generation of revolutionaries must be conditioned to an austere life from an early age. Now the child was already weaned; how happy his father would be to see his photograph . . . !

"Sister Chiang!"

She turned to see Fu Chih-kao edging his way through the crowd with a big suitcase on his shoulder.

"It will be sometime before the boat sails. Let's go and wait on the river bank," suggested Sister Chiang. She picked up her little bedroll and led him away from the crowd. Finding a quiet spot, she sat down on the bedroll as if patiently waiting for sailing time. Fu Chih-kao also put down his suitcase, flicked a few specks of dust from his dark-blue clothes, and then sat down on it. "It was almost midnight before Yu Hsin-chiang sent the things over. . . . I was worried that something might have happened to him," he said.

To all appearance the two were just chatting idly, as they waited for the fog to lift. In a low voice he said to Sister Chiang: "Hsiao Yu said that the two hundred copies of *Forward* — a

special issue with the article 'The Present Situation and Our Tasks' and the two sets of equipment that the repair shops in the mountains wanted, were given to the messengers last night. The suitcase is filled with drugs badly needed there."

Sister Chiang asked quietly: "Are they packed according to my instructions?" Although no one was near, she maintained her vigilance. Even if anyone had been watching them they would have looked like ordinary passengers waiting for the fog to lift.

Fu Chih-kao nodded. "Your identification papers are right on top. Here is the key."

Sister Chiang took the key, watched Fu Chih-kao take out his handkerchief and wipe his brow, then asked: "Why didn't you get a porter?"

"It isn't heavy and besides we mustn't pamper ourselves. Why get someone else to carry the suitcase? Anyhow, it's safer if I carry it myself!"

"Safer?" Sister Chiang shook her head. She had a feeling that he was trying to show how "inured to hardships" he was. Glancing at the passengers she remarked: "Look, is there anyone else here dressed in a Western suit and carrying his own luggage?"

"Eh?" Fu Chih-kao whistled under his breath and scratched his glossy head. "I overlooked that point!" With a self critical smile he exclaimed: "I've been doing underground work all these years, and I make a mistake about a simple thing like carrying a suitcase!" After a moment's pause he turned expectantly to Sister Chiang.

"We may not meet again for a long time, Sister Chiang. Tell me what you think of me."

Sister Chiang didn't answer immediately. She seemed to be thinking how she had exchanged opinions more than once with Fu Chih-kao, while passing on her various duties as secretary of the Shatse district Party committee. After a while she said slowly:

"There's just one thing. Hua Wei tells me you often send

Chen Sung-lin to carry out activities at Chungking University. Is that true?"

"Yes, but that belongs to the past now." Fu Chih-kao hesitated slightly before proceeding. "Chen Sung-lin did occasionally go to Chungking University, but only to take books and newspapers to Hua Wei."

"Nevertheless," Sister Chiang pursued, "I feel that wasn't the right thing to do. Have you ever thought it over carefully?"

He knew what Sister Chiang meant. "Sister Chiang, thank you for your reminder. I will certainly . . . pay more attention to my methods of work. . . ."

It was nearly time to go. Groups of chattering passengers were walking towards the wharf.

Fu Chih-kao asked with concern:

"Sister Chiang, you won't be returning to Chungking for some time. Will friends be taking care of your child?"

Sister Chiang nodded slowly and replied: "The Party has helped me make arrangements. My only worry is that the comrades may pamper the child, and spoil him!"

"Give my regards to Comrade Peng. . . . Ah, the passengers are going on board!"

As they were about to part, two gunshots rang out. All heads turned in the direction of the firing. Someone shouted:

"A conscript has jumped off the government vessel into the river!"

Several more shots rang out.

The fog had thinned and a landing-craft could be seen tied up nearby. A long column of conscripts were embarking. Above them fluttered the Kuomintang flag with its white sun on a blue background. Rows of newly made heavy guns stood on the deck, and stevedores were carrying sacks of provisions down the lowered ramp into the hold.

"Was he hit?" a passenger asked.

"Who knows?"

"He must have been desperate, jumping into the river in this freezing weather!"

"What else could he do? The landing-craft is leaving Szechuan today. . . ."

Sister Chiang shook hands with Fu Chih-kao and counselled him in a low voice: "You'd better go back! Send my regards to the comrades of the district committee. The storm has not yet passed, so you people staying in Chungking must be careful!"

Fu Chih-kao smiled confidently. "Don't worry, Sister Chiang. I'm sure that when we meet again, the clouds here will have scattered and the sun will be shining."

"Goodbye!"

Sister Chiang watched Fu Chih-kao until he was swallowed up by the fog, and then stepped aboard.

An attendant examined her ticket. "Upper deck cabin, over there!"

The smoky steerage and the freezing deck were packed with people who could not afford to pay for berths. The sheets of canvas, along the sides of the ship to protect it from the wind, were in shreds and flapped loudly against the iron railing. Children were wailing and worried mothers were doing their best to comfort them. The whole vessel was in an uproar. Sister Chiang found her cabin near the bow of the ship, undid her bedroll, and made up the berth. She tried to stow her suitcase under the berth, but it was too big, so she put it on top instead. A steward was passing the door and Sister Chiang asked him when they were sailing.

"The fog hasn't lifted yet," he said. "We'll probably sail at about nine o'clock."

"Is the first mate, Mr. Ho, about?"

"Are you Miss Li, his cousin?" he asked, his eyes noting Sister Chiang's smart attire.

Sister Chiang smiled and nodded.

"Mr. Ho was on night-duty. He told me to look out for you and wake him as soon as you came aboard."

At that very moment the first mate arrived, a greatcoat

thrown over his shoulders. "Hello, cousin, I've been waiting for you. Are you travelling alone?"

"My husband can't leave his work. I'm glad to go home again after all these years. . . . Please be seated, cousin. . . ." Sister Chiang lifted the suitcase from the bed but seemed at a loss to know what to do with it. She complained: "I didn't want to bring the suitcase, but your brother insisted. It's so cumbersome on a long trip!"

"I'll have it in my cabin," offered the first mate, as he called a steward to take it there.

The steward was about to take it away, when Sister Chiang stopped him. "Wait a minute, I want to take something out." She replaced it on the bed and unlocked it. There, for all eyes to see, were pink undies and flowered silk gowns. . . . She took out an elegant handbag and a medicine bottle, which she flourished with a smile. "My husband really thinks of everything. He bought aunty some special medicine. . . . Just look, he even packed some cod-liver oil, thinking that there might not be any in the countryside. I'm worn out carrying such things around!" She laughed, locked up the suitcase and gave it to the steward.

"The boat won't sail for a while yet. Shall we go on deck and look at the view?"

Sister Chiang nodded in agreement. She picked up her handbag, and was about to step out of the cabin with the first mate, when a peremptory command rang out on the other side of the boat:

"Get ready for luggage inspection! All passengers remain where they are!"

The hubbub on the ship died down, as two white uniformed policemen walked along, followed by several soldiers, bayonets glinting coldly on the rifles slung over their shoulders. Inspection started in the steerage, and there was a sound of bayonets prying open wooden boxes and puncturing tins, interspersed with the wailing of children.

"No need to be so rough! Don't spill my bean sauce!" protested a voice.

Then came the sound of a jar being smashed, followed by a woman's shrill wail: "Ayah, my pickles!"

An inspector entered the cabin. A young girl with braids, and dressed like a student, was the first to be closely questioned. Reclining on her bed, Sister Chiang casually picked up the *Central Daily* which she had just borrowed from one of the passengers and started to glance through it.

"May I inquire where you are going, Miss?" asked the inspector.

Sister Chiang lowered the newspaper, looked the inspector up and down and answered haughtily: "Hochuan."

"Your identification papers?"

With gloved fingers Sister Chiang picked up her handbag, unzipped it, took out her papers and tossed them on the bed.

The arrogant inspector was completely cowed by this well-dressed woman passenger. He picked up the documents covered with big official seals and hastily glanced through them. Then with profuse apologies, he backed out of the cabin. "We are merely carrying out our duties, Miss," he said, with the utmost courtesy.

There were whispered curses from all sides as the policeman went down the gangway.

At last the ship weighed anchor.

Sister Chiang left her cabin and strolled to the bow of the ship. The fog had lifted, the sky had cleared and rays of golden sunshine played on the green waves of the Chialing River.

"Farewell, mountain city! Farewell, comrades!" whispered Sister Chiang. They were now passing the Yangtze Ordnance Works, and on the hillside, she could make out the little brick house where Cheng Kang lived. Wisps of smoke curled above the banks of the Chialing River, and from the fleets of river-boats came the stirring echoes of boatmen's shanties. Chung-king gradually faded into the distance. Sister Chiang's head-

scarf fluttered in the wind as she stood, watching the distant horizon, her heart filled with hope. . . .

A mud-spattered cross-country bus drove up to the bus-station yard and rolled to a stop. Passengers scrambled out, and the luggage on the roof was untied and handed down.

"It's raining, sister, and the road is bad," said Hua Wei, who had come with Sister Chiang from Hochuan. "There are no porters about, let me carry your luggage." He picked up the suitcase and was about to hoist her bedroll on to his shoulder, but Sister Chiang stopped him.

"You take the suitcase. I'll carry the bedroll."

Sister Chiang had never been to northern Szechuan before, so Hua Wei was acting as her guide. For convenience' sake they called each other brother and sister during the trip. A bus-station official shouted:

"Passengers please line up here for luggage inspection!"

Sister Chiang was caught off guard. The bus driver left his seat, sauntered to her, and whispered:

"There was no inspection last time I came here. They seem to have suddenly tightened up. . . ."

He calmly took the precious suitcase from Hua Wei and set it down beside his driving seat, quietly saying: "I'll bring it back to you later."

Sister Chiang was unfamiliar with the local situation and thought it best to keep quiet. Hua Wei nodded to the driver and said: "We'll wait for you at the city gate!"

The travellers were subjected to a rigorous search at the bus-station exit. Sister Chiang showed her papers, but the police searched her bedroll. Sister Chiang was somewhat surprised, and could only assume that the county seat was suffering a particularly severe wave of White terror. If the driver had not protected them, they might have run into trouble the moment they had arrived at their destination!

They were relieved to get safely out of the bus station and didn't linger. Sister Chiang was worried about the suitcase

containing the drugs, and wondered how long it would be before the driver returned it. She asked Hua Wei: "How far is it to the city?"

"Not far, only about ten minutes' walk." Hua Wei was quite calm. He was younger than Sister Chiang and a minor incident like a luggage inspection did not bother him.

He was in excellent spirits, and as they walked along, he gazed eagerly towards his hometown, which he could see in the distance. Only a few years ago he had been studying in the middle school there. He had often run errands and delivered letters for his mother, and participated in underground activities. Every stone, every tree was familiar to him. He had left his mother to enter Chungking University. Later he had heard that she had gone with other comrades into the mountains. He rejoiced today, because he was coming back to take part in the armed struggle. The danger they had just escaped could not dampen his exuberance and he whispered to Sister Chiang: "Just look at those mountains! Perhaps mother doesn't yet know that I'm on my way back!"

Li Ching-yuan had told Sister Chiang that Hua Wei's mother was a remarkable old comrade, resolute and widely experienced in revolutionary struggle. She and Peng Sung-tao were now working together in the countryside. Sister Chiang already felt close to this old comrade. Her eyes followed the direction of Hua Wei's pointing finger. There, beyond the fields, and dimly visible through the veil of rain, a majestic mountain range rose from the edge of the plain, its soaring peaks clothed in green forests. . . .

"How beautiful!" she exclaimed, "so this is the famous Hua-ying range."

Hua Wei nodded, and with suppressed excitement, told her that they would soon be meeting the guerillas!

Sister Chiang smiled happily. As she walked she gazed longingly on the towering peaks. Perhaps Peng Sung-tao lived in those mountains. But they were so huge. How could they find him? Maybe Hua Wei knew the paths, but she was in no

hurry to ask. She wondered if Peng Sung-tao was living on top of that high peak over there — the one that looked like a sharp sword about to pierce the sky! Then she realized the absurdity of the idea. Living so high up, he would be divorced from the masses! All the same, she couldn't help thinking that he might be there.

"Do you see that faint white spot halfway up the mountain? That is an old Red Army command post of the days of the Szechuan-Shensi Soviet!"

It was not at all as she had imagined it! It was sited not on top of the mountain, but halfway down. Sister Chiang had to smile at her own foolish fancies.

"That place is called the Eastern Sea Temple. The terrain is rugged, with a precipice on the left and a mountain pool on the right. It is said that the pool is connected with the legendary Eastern Sea, that's why the place is known as the Eastern Sea Temple."

"I couldn't have a better guide than you," Sister Chiang said gaily as she quickened her steps.

"This is my home, you know! My mother took part in the revolutionary struggles in the old days and fought in those mountains. . . ."

"What about your father?"

"I don't know." Hua Wei was silent for a moment and then said quietly: "My father was captured by the enemy when I was very young. He probably died long ago. . . ."

Sister Chiang hadn't known that Hua Wei had such an unhappy memory. She felt that she should not dwell too much on the past, and stopped asking any more about it.

After a while she continued gently: "Then it was your mother who brought you up?"

"Yes, I was always with my mother, but I never saw her shed a tear. She'd often say: 'Child, grow up quickly, the Red Army is sure to come back! Blood debts must be paid in blood, and the revolution will go on, even if only orphans and widows are left . . . !' Now mum has gone back into the

mountains with the guerillas. I've heard she's a commander now."

As Sister Chiang listened attentively, her thoughts seemed to take wing and fly into the mountains to this veteran comrade-in-arms, who had become so real to her through Hua Wei's words. "How lucky you are to have such a heroic mother," she said. "I'm longing to meet her."

"You'll meet her all right," Hua Wei assured her. "They say no one calls her by her proper name. People refer to her respectfully as 'Grandma.' "

Listening to Hua Wei, Sister Chiang's thoughts strayed to her husband Peng Sung-tao, who was fighting shoulder-to-shoulder with "Grandma." How she had missed him! Today, after a whole year's separation, she would be reunited with him! She would see him and share with him this new life of battle! Her heart throbbed with excitement.

They had not far to go now, but the rain was getting heavier and the muddy road more slippery. The other passengers were far ahead of them. Sister Chiang's headscarf was soaked and she raised her hand to protect her face. Peering ahead through the grey curtain of rain, she saw a crowd of people milling round the city gate. She had a premonition that there might be another search, and although she had identification papers she did not want to take unnecessary risks. Glancing around, she saw that there was a small tavern by the roadside.

"Let's have something to eat," she suggested. "And take shelter from the rain a while."

There were no other customers in the little tavern. Sitting down at a table Sister Chiang inquired about what they usually served.

Hua Wei grinned and said: "Let's have a dish of spicy beancurd. And try a bowl of jelly! We people in northern Szechuan like it hot and spicy."

Sister Chiang agreed with a smile.

Hua Wei picked up his bowl of jelly to try it.

"Taste it, Sister Chiang, it's wonderful!" he exclaimed with

gusto. "It's much better here in the countryside than in the city. Once, when I was small, I ate so much of it that I was sick and got the runs. My mother was really worried!"

"You must have been a little blighter!"

Hua Wei didn't contradict her. "Once," he said mischievously, "when mother had just taught me how to shoot, I used our old hen as a target. What a spanking I got!"

With a happy, far-away look, Hua Wei talked of his childhood days. Back again at the scene of his earlier years, everything seemed familiar, natural and delightful. His expression told Sister Chiang of his love for his hometown and how much he was part of it.

"My mother and I went through every conceivable hardship, so I've been used to a tough life since childhood. But, when I think back those are days worth remembering. There may have been nothing but hardships, but somehow I've always loved this place."

The rain had now abated somewhat, but water was still pouring from the eaves as Hua Wei talked confidently of his hopes.

"Some day we'll sink oil wells in the Huaying mountains! A great steel bridge will span the Chialing River! Railroads will link us with all parts of the country and transport Szechuan's products to the whole nation!" Hua Wei reflected a moment, then whispered: "We'll also set up a monument to the martyrs who gave their lives for the revolution!"

Sister Chiang finished eating and set down her chopsticks.

Hua Wei, so serious and quiet at the university, made no effort to conceal his happiness at returning to his hometown. He had become lively and talkative, and the cautious expression he had worn all through the trip seemed to have been washed away by the rain. Sister Chiang had not been quite at ease on entering the tavern, but as there were no other customers she relaxed.

"Sister Chiang," mumbled Hua Wei between mouthfuls of rice. "You'll love this place after you've lived here a few

years among the guerillas! Some day you must settle down in northern Szechuan! First we'll fight for it, and then we'll build it up!"

"What if Cheng Yao isn't willing to come? Would you still want to settle down here?" Sister Chiang asked with a smile.

Hua Wei answered without a moment's hesitation: "I couldn't give my heart to a girl who didn't love northern Szechuan!" Then he added confidentially: "She has already told me that she wants to come."

Sister Chiang smiled. Seeing her in such a happy mood, Hua Wei made bold to ask: "Sister, I've heard that your husband is also in the Huaying mountains. Wouldn't it be wonderful if he were with my mother!" Then with a mischievous wink he continued: "I don't know my brother-in-law's name yet."

Sister Chiang laughed merrily. "You'll find out when you meet him!"

Hua Wei had been so busy talking that he hadn't done justice to the food before him, and so Sister Chiang deliberately changed the subject: "There's still some food in the dish. Finish it with another bowl of rice."

Hua Wei lowered his head and got on with his meal. Sister Chiang noticed that it was still raining. She was troubled by the problem of how to get into the city. It had previously been arranged that they were to establish contact by sending the suitcase to a liaison post in the city. Someone from there would then escort them to the mountains. Judging from appearances, the situation had changed, and it was probably too dangerous to send the suitcase into the city. Even if they waited at the city gate for the bus driver to bring it to them they might attract attention. So she decided to go to the city gate to have a look round, and told Hua Wei to wait for the bus driver at the tavern and take his time over his food.

Hua Wei nodded and started eating slowly.

Sister Chiang walked to the door of the tavern. As a precautionary measure, she asked the bewhiskered old inn-keeper who was sitting at the counter:

"Granddad, can I buy any umbrella anywhere near here?"

Following his directions, Sister Chiang walked slowly towards the city gate. She hastened her steps as she wondered why there was still such a crowd. There were bareheaded, barefooted porters, and peasants in broad-brimmed rainhats, as well as townsfolk and merchants with umbrellas. Some of them glanced at the top of the city wall and walked away with lowered heads. Others stood, whispering to each other, and looking up at the wall. Sister Chiang, sensing that something was wrong, peered through the drizzle and vaguely made out something hanging on the gate tower.

As she got closer she could now see several wooden cages hanging on the gate tower. Ah! Could it be a public display of the heads of criminals? She hurried forward in horror, and saw that the wooden cages actually contained gory human heads!

She mingled with the people at the gate, and heard heavy sighs and exclamations of indignation from every side. She was deeply touched by their grief and sympathy. Although not yet quite clear about this situation, she knew from past experience that the martyrs must be her own comrades. Another group of revolutionaries had sacrificed their precious lives for the Party and the people! "Rest in peace, comrades," she murmured. "We'll avenge you!" Thinking of her own mission, she made an effort to compose herself. She turned around and quietly walked away, not wanting to see any more of this gruesome sight. She had gone a few steps, when she thought that she would be letting down her martyred comrades if she went away without finding out who they were. She must look carefully, find out their names, and the circumstances of their death, and later inform the Party, so that their sacrifice would not be forgotten. Every drop of blood they had shed would sow seeds of revenge!

Sister Chiang retraced her steps, forcing herself to look calm and suppressing the waves of anger which rose in her breast. There was a huge notice pasted on the city wall. The writing

was blurred by the rain, but she was able to see that several rows of names had been marked with red ink, which had run in the rain and made the notice look as if it were splashed with blood. . . . Sister Chiang squeezed through the crowd and went up to the notice.

Her attention was caught by a name in the first row, and when she looked again she was rooted to the spot in horror. She could scarcely believe her eyes. Surely this was a trick of the imagination. His name! How could his name be on the notice? Icy chills ran down her spine and lights seemed to dance before her eyes. The notice seemed to be moving in front of her. Sister Chiang wiped the rain and the cold sweat from her forehead. She looked again at his name! It was still there!

Peng Sung-tao, political commissar
of the Mount Huaying detachment

Peng Sung-tao! Her own beloved! Her comrade-in-arms, fellow-Communist and husband, with whom she had spent so many years and shared so many hardships! It was incredible. How could he die when there was so much work to be done? It must be a trick of the enemy! But whose mutilated head was that hanging there? Impelled by a force stronger than her sorrow, Sister Chiang inched forward, and looked at the gate tower. Through the rain and mist, she recognized his dear, familiar features. There was no mistake. It was her husband! There was a yearning in his wide staring eyes, as if in his last moments he had been looking towards victory for the long-suffering people. Peng Sung-tao! Peng Sung-tao! Why aren't you leading your men against the enemy? Didn't we pledge to fight together till the dawn of a new day?

Hot tears welled up in her eyes. She put her hand to her choking throat and closed her eyes to shut out the sight. She wanted to cry aloud. Wave after wave of dizziness made her feel faint and she swayed on her feet. . . .

"Sister!"

A familiar voice brought her back to reality. Startled, she

By Wu Fan

stepped back and slowly turned around. Hua Wei was looking at her with deep concern. "Sister, I have been searching for you everywhere!"

She saw the suitcase in Hua Wei's hand. . . .

The sight of the suitcase made her ask herself what she was doing. In her misery she reproached herself: Was this the time or the place for self-pity? What about the task with which the Party had entrusted her? She had no business to reveal her grief, and even less to linger. Gritting her teeth, she glanced round the crowd, fumbled with her soaking-wet headscraf, and said to Hua Wei in a low but firm voice:

"Let's go. We won't enter the city."

She took the bedroll and motioned to Hua Wei to move quickly. She stood still, and once more raised her head to gaze at the gate tower now shrouded in rain and mist. . . .

At last she tore herself away and silently hurried after Hua Wei. She stumbled through puddles of rainwater, splashing her shoes and stockings with mud, oblivious to everything. She was concentrating on holding back her grief — a grief which would be with her all her life, buried in the innermost recesses of her being. Her dry eyes stared fixedly ahead. . . . The hatred in her heart deepened and it became more bitter than tears!

She hastened her pace, unconscious of the weight of the bedroll. Hua Wei, who was carrying the suitcase, gradually fell behind, unable to keep up with her.

A peasant with a basket on his back was walking ahead of them along a winding stone-flagged path. He turned towards a decline. Sister Chiang and Hua Wei followed at a distance, careful not to lose sight of him.

Hua Wei had never been here before. They walked over hills and mountains, making a detour whenever they came near a village. It was already mid-afternoon, and their guide had not uttered a word to them, nor had he stopped to take a rest. Hua Wei now realized that it was no easy matter to break through the enemy's blockade.

Sister Chiang had not spoken since they had set out, and she seemed to have a great load on her heart. Hua Wei couldn't understand this. He had only been waiting in the tavern for a short time when the bus driver had arrived with the suitcase. He could not have been separated from her for more than ten minutes. He could not make out why she had changed so much and had looked so queer when he had found her. In his concern for her, he had paid little attention to the notice on the city gate. It was natural to feel grieved at the sight of dead comrades desecrated by the enemy, but Sister Chiang seemed to be overcome by very deep emotion. He thought that, under the circumstances, she had been right not to enter the city and to abandon the first method of establishing contact. He had followed her suggestion to use the alternative method. They had made their way to White Pagoda Village, where they went to the Hsinglung Inn and pretended to inquire about lodgings. As soon as they exchanged the password with the "proprietor" he urged them to eat quickly and get on their way again. He told them that they would be conducted to a secret place, the enemy's tight blockade having made it impossible for them to go to the guerillas in the mountains for the time being. The "proprietor" had looked anxious and tense, and had given them no other information.

Sister Chiang had changed into peasant garb, and the "proprietor" had given the suitcase and bedroll to the peasant who was to be their guide. He stowed their luggage in his big basket and covered it with odds and ends. Before leaving, the "proprietor" repeatedly cautioned them to be very careful as the situation was very tense. He advised them not to talk with their guide and to keep a good distance behind him. If anything should happen, they were to use their own judgment and do what they deemed best. . . . Hua Wei had not fully realized at first how serious matters were, and attributed the "proprietor's" uneasiness to the spectacle at the city gate. It was only after repeated detours to avoid many an enemy sentry post in the nearby villages, that he gradually understood that the "proprietor" had

not been exaggerating and that the situation in the countryside was indeed very tense.

A stab of pain went through Hua Wei as he looked at the fields by the roadside, they were rank with weeds, and though it was a time for flowering, the wheat stalks in the fields were sparse and shrivelled. The peas and beans too were stunted, in spite of the fact that all this was good fertile land. He realized that conscription and grain levies by the Kuomintang reactionaries were making existence well-nigh impossible for the peasants round his hometown. . . .

Their guide quickened his steps as he passed a dilapidated temple on a hill-top and went on into the wood beyond it. When Sister Chiang came to the temple gate, she slowed down and then stopped, ignoring Hua Wei's impatience to keep up with the peasant. Some couplets carved on the temple gate-posts had caught her attention. Hua Wei explained that there were many such relics of the Szechuan-Shensi Soviet in the neighbourhood.

Sister Chiang's gaze lingered on the bold, beautifully inscribed characters. They gave her new strength and eased her burning grief.

> The hammer falls and the old world crumbles,
> We swing the sickle, new worlds to gain.

Bold characters painted across the top of the gate took the place of the usual tablet.

> Carry forward the cause of the fallen!

How many revolutionaries in this stormy epoch had left inspiring words like these, words which reached deep down into the well of one's emotions! Her eyes watered as she responded with her whole being to the militant call of the staunch fighters of yesterday.

In front of them was a grove of bamboos, partly concealing a big walled compound. Their peasant guide came to a halt beneath a tree with wide-spreading branches, growing on a cliff close to the compound. From here they had a view of majestic mountain ranges rolling away into the distance. The peasant

turned around, nodded towards them significantly, and then walked through the bamboo grove towards the compound. He put the basket down on the drying-ground in front of the compound and then went away by himself. This compound was bigger and better built than those usually seen in the countryside. Chickens pecked in the yard and a buffalo was tied to a post by the pigsty. Several peasants were sitting in the yard, repairing farm implements. One of them came up to them, picked up the basket and nodded. He led them past the central hall, through several rooms and finally to the rear courtyard.

Sister Chiang and Hua Wei halted. Almost immediately a straight-backed old woman, her hair streaked with grey, came out of the door, holding up the corner of her gown as she hurried towards them.

"Mother!" called Hua Wei as he rushed forward and grasped the old woman's hands. He had not expected to see her here, thinking that she would be away in the mountains with the guerillas.

When they entered the room, the peasant who had shown them in had already taken the suitcase and the bedroll out of the basket, and left.

"Mother, let me introduce you," Hua Wei said. "Comrade Chiang Hsueh-chin, or Sister Chiang, as we call her."

The old lady looked her up and down, then stretched out her arms and hugged Chiang Hsueh-chin.

"I've known for a long time that you were coming!"

The old lady's voice was strong and authoritative in sharp contrast to her kindly eyes. Sister Chiang smiled lightly and put her arm round the old lady's thin shoulders.

"Come inside and have a rest." Taking Sister Chiang by the hand, the old lady led her through a doorway into a simply furnished bedroom. Sister Chiang was comforted by the presence of this frank, straightforward "Grandma" of whom she had heard so much. But the old lady seemed somewhat disturbed, as if she were trying to keep some inner feelings in check. As Sister Chiang sat down, she said: "It's a pity that Lao Peng

had to leave yesterday on an inspection tour but he'll be back in a few days. Hua Wei, why don't you pour out some tea for Sister Chiang?"

The old lady took the bowl of hot tea from Hua Wei and placed it in Sister Chiang's hands.

"Have some tea then we can talk!" She glanced round the narrow room as she explained: "The enemy's blockade has been very tight for the last few days and it is not easy to get into the mountains, so Lao Peng asked me to come here to meet you. This is the home of the township head, one of our comrades. It is quite safe here."

As Sister Chiang sipped her tea, she took a good look at the old lady. She could see that this seasoned old fighter must be an awe-inspiring commander on the battlefield, one to put fear into the enemy's heart. But at this moment she seemed somewhat ill at ease. Why did she say that about Peng Sung-tao? Slowly putting down her cup and forcing herself to sound cheerful, Sister Chiang said: "Let me make my report."

"There's no hurry," the old lady interrupted. "Let's eat first."

With great will-power Sister Chiang suppressed her emotions and continued to gaze at her comrade-in-arms. Very soon, steaming hot food was brought in, evidently prepared in anticipation of her arrival.

"Let's eat!" The old lady picked out the dainty morsels with her own chopsticks and put them into the visitor's bowl. . . .

"Taste this, one doesn't get such fresh vegetables in the city." Without waiting for Sister Chiang to speak, she continued:

"This bowl of stewed pork was made especially for you, so eat as much as you can. My teeth are bad and I can't chew lean meat. . . . I need soft food like taro and turnips. Lao Peng plants them for me up in the mountains whenever he has time. . . . Why isn't the wine here yet?" The old lady was unusually talkative and spoke so quickly and so much that Sister Chiang couldn't get a word in edgewise. Hua Wei too found his mother's behaviour strange; he had never seen her acting like this before.

The old lady's sleeve overturned an empty winecup. "Ah yes, the wine! Go and get it, Hua Wei!" Flustered, Hua Wei put down his chopsticks and hurried out.

The old lady had again mentioned Lao Peng, and Sister Chiang couldn't help wondering whether she didn't know about her husband's death. Or was she trying to keep the news from her for the time being? The old lady seemed so confident: perhaps by some chance Peng Sung-tao had not died, and it was all a hideous enemy trick. And yet — she had seen those staring eyes that would never close.... She scrutinized the old lady's face, but her expression did not change as she continued to heap food in her bowl.

Hua Wei returned with a bottle of wine. The old lady filled a cup and handed it to Sister Chiang, then poured two more, one for Hua Wei and one for herself. She raised her cup.

"Sister Chiang, on behalf of all the comrades and of Lao Peng I drink this cup of wine to welcome you!" Sister Chiang had not expected that she would again mention Lao Peng. Racked by agonizing grief, her lips barely tasted the wine, and listlessly she put it down again. She sensed that the well-intentioned old lady was also concealing a great sorrow and did not want to hurt her by showing that she knew the truth. Not wishing to seem ungrateful for the old lady's kindness she forced herself to finish the food for which she had no appetite and put down her chopsticks.

The old lady glanced at her, asking: "Why do you eat so little?"

"Sister Chiang has not got a large appetite," Hua Wei answered for her. He could not understand his mother's insistence, and had no idea what was troubling Sister Chiang.

"Aren't you feeling well?"

"I'm all right."

The old lady's eyes searched her guest's face for a long time. Although Sister Chiang did her best to conceal her emotions, her cheeks were pale and her eyes glistened with tears. The old lady turned to Hua Wei:

"What's the matter?"

"I've never had a large appetite," Sister Chiang hurriedly repeated what Hua Wei had said.

Hua Wei reflected a moment and then told his mother: "Sister Chiang and I are both heavy-hearted. At the city gate we saw. . . ."

"What?"

Hua Wei bowed his head with a deep sigh. ". . . wooden cages. I didn't read the notice. . . ." He glanced at Sister Chiang as if to say that she must have remembered the names on it.

The old lady suddenly paled, and she stared at Sister Chiang horror-struck.

"I know everything!" said Sister Chiang, grasping her hands. Her tears flowed uncontrollably. With head erect she looked into the old lady's eyes and quickly said: "I saw him...."

The old lady drew Sister Chiang into her arms as the tears rolled down her wrinkled cheeks. She said nothing.

Sister Chiang's voice was choked with sobs. "I know that the comrades didn't want to add to my misery. I know that you. . . . Perhaps it was better for me to learn about it quickly. . . . Lao Peng's work must be carried on. . . ."

"Forgive me, Sister Chiang!" said Hua Wei, understanding at last why the exposed heads at the city gate had caused her such great distress. "All the way . . . I didn't realize how terrible you must have been feeling. . . ." Hot tears flowed down his cheeks. He rushed out the door slamming behind him.

"Don't try and hold it back, my dear. . . ."

In a voice choked with tears, the old lady comforted Sister Chiang. "I understand. I've been through it myself. . . . All these years, I've fought for victory, fought to make the great ideals of our dear ones come true. . . . A fighter's tears are not signs of weakness; they are a pledge to the revolution from a staunch and loyal heart. . . . You're with comrades, so let yourself go and cry yourself out. . . ."

Although Sister Chiang did all she could to hold them back,

the hot tears streamed down her cheeks. She wanted to say something, but the words wouldn't come out. She drew closer to the old lady who comforted her like a mother. Her thoughts kept returning to the mist-shrouded tower.

Sister Chiang had never dreamed that such a disaster would overtake her. So many happy expectations, so many hopes of fighting shoulder to shoulder — all had burst like so many bubbles. She had even thought of his T.B. and had bought a bottle of cod-liver oil for him before setting out. He would never need it now. . . . She leaned weakly on the old lady's shoulder, her tear-filled eyes staring wide open. She wanted to wail aloud.

"No, no! That isn't right!" She suddenly shook her head. "What good would it do to wail?"

The old lady silently pressed Sister Chiang to her bosom. Sister Chiang sobbed spasmodically and gradually controlled her tears. At last she slowly raised her head and looked deep into the old lady's eyes. Mirrored in them were their shared feeling of infinite love for the cause, and of bitter hatred for the enemy. "You said that the revolution will go on even if only the orphans and widows are left. Tears will not help to bring the revolution nearer." Sister Chiang spoke from the depths of her heart.

"Sister Chiang. . . ." The old lady's strong fingers tenderly stroked Chiang's hair as she gently told her the truth which she had tried to hide.

"A mass rally against conscription and grain levies was being held at Two Rivers, and at the last moment, Lao Peng decided to take part in it. As he was about to enter the market-place, he discovered that it was surrounded by Kuomintang troops who had set up two machine-guns ready to mow them all down. The people at the rally were still shouting slogans unaware of their danger. A minute later, and the market-place would have been swimming in blood! At the critical moment, Lao Peng fired a warning shot and then covered their retreat. . . . And

so, for the sake of more than a thousand people, Lao Peng and a few other comrades. . . ."

Sister Chiang listened silently. The old lady's words seemed to recreate the scene before her eyes. Her tears had now ceased and she murmured softly:

"I hope I will be sent to the place where Lao Peng used to work. . . ."

The voice of the old lady, who had seen so much sorrow and pain, was resolute: "Yes, we must carry forward the cause of the fallen!" Then, in reverent memory, she added: "Lao Peng used to say 'if you take the masses as your parents, the masses will look upon you as their son.' He was loyal and devoted to the last. He has left an inspiring example for us and all the people to follow!"

5

"CHEN Sung-lin, have you read today's papers?" asked Li Chi-kang as he came into the dormitory, interrupting Chen Sung-lin and Cheng Ke-chang, who had been talking together for some time. He sat on the bed and unfolded the *Central Daily* in his hand. His room-mates had gone to their lectures, but he hadn't felt like it today. He had gone out to buy a newspaper instead, and had strolled around the school grounds and then returned. He started reading aloud, commenting on the news as he read.

"What rubbish! Mount Huaying Communist bandit detachment completely annihilated. Bandit chief Peng Sung-tao and others decapitated, heads on public display. . . . The editorial is headlined 'Greet Huaying Triumph' . . . also, 'Head of Information Department of the Southwest Bureau Makes Statement'. . . . The whole page is full of this kind of stuff!"

Li Chi-kang tossed the paper on to the bed and said with disgust: "Now the reactionaries are talking big, boasting that this victory will be a stepping-stone to further successes, and that they will soon have complete control in Szechuan. They tell the people not to let Communists make use of them. It's the same old story! But I'm worried, Chen Sung-lin. It looks as if there has been a serious setback in the struggle in the countryside."

"Nonsense! Don't you believe Central News Agency rubbish." There was not the slightest doubt in Chen Sung-lin's mind as he said: "I'm positive that the fighting in the countryside has put the reactionaries in a tough spot. Their rear reserves have all been tied down. Look, if it weren't so. . . . Why should they say 'Strong forces are following up the victory and continuing mopping up.' If, as they claim, the Mount Huaying Column has been completely 'annihilated,' why should they continue to 'mop' it up? What else would there be to mop up? Mop up a non-existent column? It's all eyewash! But there's one good thing about this news: the reactionaries have at last been compelled to admit the existence of the Mount Huaying Column which they've refused to do up to now. So this article is a proof of how quickly the column has grown and developed."

Cheng Ke-chang had been reading the novel, *How the Steel Was Tempered*, which Chen Sung-lin had brought him. He put down his book and observed: "The contingent must have suffered heavy losses; even the victims' names are in the paper. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin retorted heatedly: "Heavy losses? Can there be revolutions without people losing their lives? Since when have revolutionaries been afraid of death?"

"You're right," Li Chi-kang immediately took up the thread. "When one man falls, thousands take his place. I agree with you there."

"What I was going to point out," Cheng Ke-chang explained, "was that others must take the place of those who die. We too should work harder and make practical contributions, so that some day we shall be able to look back and feel that we were worthy of the era in which we are now living."

This was just how Chen Sung-lin felt too. He thumped the bed with his fist and exclaimed: "How I wish I could go to the countryside!"

Cheng Ke-chang looked at him but did not say anything. Li Chi-kang, however, enthusiastically took up the subject. "Hua Wei has left the university. I believe he was a native of northern Szechuan, perhaps he has gone back," he surmised.

"Hua Wei?" replied Chen Sung-lin. "Like every one of us, he goes wherever he is needed!"

Li Chi-kang was silent for a while and then said: "It's all the same wherever we go. Anyway, aren't people needed in Chungking too? I must admit I still have some petty-bourgeois

sentiments, because I can't bear to part from a good friend."

"Why should you feel that way?" Chen Sung-lin asked, remembering what Hua Wei had said when he said goodbye to him. He had quoted two lines of classical poetry.

> As long as one has a true friend,
> He is close even when far away.

He now repeated them to Li Chi-kang.

Li Chi-kang nodded. "What you said has made me think. We should strive unceasingly."

Cheng Ke-chang then remarked: "You two are getting bookish. One quotes from the classics and the other wants to 'strive unceasingly.' Cousin, Chen Sung-lin is not leaving Chungking, so why are you being so gloomy? As for myself, I feel that all young men of ambition should travel far and wide. But that reminds me, the *Comet* is due out tomorrow and you've only half finished your article. . . ."

"Get on with your article then, I won't bother you," said Chen Sung-lin gathering up several books they had just returned to him, as he got up to leave.

"All right, see you some other time. I hope you'll excuse me now." Li Chi-kang sat down at the table and took out his fountain pen. Then, as if suddenly remembering, he asked Chen Sung-lin: "How are the preparations for the new cultural magazine coming along?"

Chen Sung-lin didn't know how to answer. Fu Chih-kao had been very busy recently and had not raised the necessary funds. He was aware that Li Chi-kang was very much interested in the proposed new publication, and was willing to write articles and help with the editing. Chen Sung-lin could only answer lamely that there were still financial difficulties.

"Then let's put our heads together and see if we can think of something. There must be a solution," said Li Chi-kang. "But just now, Chen Sung-lin, I must get on with the editorial for tomorrow's *Comet*."

Cheng Ke-chang stood up slowly: "It's stuffy in here. I'll see you out, and get some fresh air."

Chen Sung-lin was worried about the difficulties that Fu Chih-kao was encountering in getting out the new publication. Cheng Ke-chang tried to comfort him, and after a while made an unexpected proposition. "I've got an idea," he said. "I'll go to the post office and talk to some literary-minded friends of mine."

"No! You mustn't mention this to anyone," Chen Sung-lin said. "If there's no way of getting any money, the matter can rest awhile."

"The weather's getting warm now, I'll sell my overcoat," Cheng Ke-chang offered. "Do you agree?"

"You haven't even got a job. How could we take your money?"

"Chen Sung-lin! I'm interested in literature, and like you, I want to see this new publication come out!" Cheng Ke-chang replied earnestly.

Early the next morning, Cheng Ke-chang went into town with his overcoat and quilt and came back with a roll of banknotes, which he took straight to the bookshop. He thrust it into Chen Sung-lin's hands without keeping anything for himself.

"Really, you shouldn't have done that," said Chen Sung-lin in a voice that betrayed his emotion.

Chen Sung-lin reported this to Fu Chih-kao at once.

"If he didn't keep a brass farthing for himself, what is he going to live on?" was the question that sprung to Fu Chih-kao's lips in his initial surprise. Then after a moment's reflection he smiled and expressed his admiration for Cheng Ke-chang's action. He said that this type of support indicated the urgent need of the masses for a progressive literary magazine. They must speed up the preparations. Fu Chih-kao took out the money he had already raised, and asked Chen Sung-lin to buy paper and to make preparations for publishing the magazine.

One evening a few days later, there was a sudden storm, while Cheng Ke-chang was reading in the bookshop. He was

wearing cloth shoes and had no umbrella, so Chen Sung-lin urged him to stay until the rain stopped. He went next door and bought two bowls of wine. After a few sips of it, Cheng Ke-chang's face became flushed and his tongue loosened up.

"Chen Sung-lin," he said, "life is so tedious. Sometimes I really feel like becoming a monk . . . or else committing suicide and ending it all."

"How can you talk that way!"

"Perhaps you think I'm a degenerate! But I have no job and if I can't find one, what am I going to live on? How can I help being depressed in this depraved society, where the rich live in luxury, and the poor don't know where their next meal is coming from? It's just as the poet said:

> The portals of the rich reek of flesh and wine
> While frozen bodies by the roadside lie.

Just look at me! When I left the post office, I nearly got arrested."

Cheng Ke-chang slowly sipped his wine, apparently struggling within himself as to whether or not to go on talking. Chen Sung-lin's warm concern encouraged him to continue.

"Have you heard about a secret publication called *Forward*?" he whispered, a guarded expression on his face. ". . . it's mimeographed on pink typing paper. There are four or five sheets to each edition . . . I got into trouble over it!"

"How?"

"We had a reading circle at the post office organized by some progressive young people. The leader of the circle was probably an underground Party member. He often used to let me read *Forward.* Once the section head caught me and I only just avoided serious trouble! The result was that I was kicked out on the charge of having 'Leftist' thoughts. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin was surprised that Cheng Ke-chang had read *Forward* and had even been in danger over it. However, this was possible. Many young people had access to *Forward* and if Cheng Ke-chang had shown himself to be progressive, he

would naturally get the opportunity to read it. No wonder he had seemed different from the general run of customers, from the first time he'd entered the bookshop.

"The Kuomintang bastards had a special mail inspection team at the post office. All copies of *Forward* found in the mailboxes were withheld. Of course, they were posted to fictitious names so the secret agents couldn't get hold of anyone for it. Occasionally they stationed agents right by the mailboxes. I wonder if people were aware of the danger they were in! Sometimes we members of the reading circle would sneak the papers back into the mail while the inspectors were out. That was real fun!"

The rain had long since stopped but they were so engrossed in conversation that they did not notice how time had slipped by. It was past midnight and too late for Cheng Ke-chang to go back to the university, so Chen Sung-lin invited him to share his bed for the night.

The next morning Cheng Ke-chang said:

"I see you are very short-handed at the bookshop, so if there is no objection I would like to help you as I haven't any other job yet."

Chen Sung-lin reported this matter to Fu Chih-kao a few days later. He agreed that Cheng Ke-chang could move into the bookshop. Chen Sung-lin, however, had some reservations on the matter. He explained that while he sympathized with Cheng Ke-chang's plight, it wasn't quite right to let outsiders move into a reserve contact post. Fu Chih-kao tried to overcome his misgivings, saying that it was unlikely that anything would go wrong if they were careful. Later, after some inquiries had been made about Cheng Ke-chang, he would be allowed to join the underground Youth Association and take part officially in the work of the bookshop. Anyhow, the bookshop was expanding and needed new personnel, and Cheng Ke-chang was undoubtedly more reliable than any other outsider. Chen Sung-lin felt that he could hardly object after hearing all this.

Cheng Ke-chang worked hard in the bookshop and studied every spare moment. He asked for no remuneration apart from his board, maintaining that he was quite content with his meals, and the chance to read all the books free. And anyway, he said, the greatest reward he could wish for was the pleasure of helping his friends and sharing their joys and sorrows.

Cheng Ke-chang's hands trembled when once again he was given a copy of *Forward*, and held it as if it were some great treasure, exclaiming: "Chen Sung-lin, I never expected to see *Forward* again!"

"Didn't your cousin ever let you see it while you were at the university?"

"He did," replied Cheng Ke-chang, "but he is very cautious, and he didn't let me read it very often."

Soon afterwards, Fu Chih-kao instructed Chen Sung-lin to let Cheng Ke-chang send out a few copies of *Forward* addressed to false names through his friends at the post office. This was to test Cheng Ke-chang's reliability and to allay Chen Sung-lin's misgivings. Fu Chih-kao subsequently announced that the copies of *Forward* had safely reached their destinations. Later, Chen Sung-lin remembered how Fu Chih-kao had raised his thumb and remarked with evident self-confidence and satisfaction: "Well then? Don't you think I'm a good judge?"

The stylus scraped across the stencil, leaving neat, even rows of white marks as the news item took shape.

". . . With the development of the nation-wide counter-offensive, the struggles against conscription, grain levies and high taxes in the countryside are intensifying. The flames of battle have spread all over the Southwest and armed guerilla forces are springing up everywhere. Their ranks have rapidly increased since their recent repulse of successive enemy attacks in eastern and northern Szechuan and on the border of Kweichow Province. The guerillas in southern Yunnan. . . ."

Absorbed in his work, Cheng Kang continued to cut the stencil with a practised hand. "The schemes of the U.S.-Kuomintang reactionaries to conscript large numbers of recruits in the Southwest will undoubtedly end in failure. Furthermore, all the enemy's second-line troops, stationed in the four provinces of Szechuan, Sikang, Yunnan and Kweichow, have been pinned down by the guerilla forces, and cannot be withdrawn and sent to the frontlines of the civil war. . . ."

After he had finished, Cheng Kang massaged his fingers which had become slightly numb. Then he checked the item word by word and glanced once more at the headlines of this issue of *Forward*.

> Helping Hand to Fellow Students Struggling for Survival.
> Middle Schools and Universities Launch Movement for Adequate Food and Shelter.
> Workers Gain New Victories in Struggle Against Expansion of Arms Production.

Cheng Kang stretched, stood up and poured out a glass of water. It was still early and he wasn't feeling at all sleepy. He sat down again and began to think about the uncompleted design for a new duplicating machine.

The hard lead pencil between his fingers was sharpened to a fine point, and the table-lamp shone brightly on the big sheet of white paper in front of him. He had stayed up late for several nights' running, trying to work out the details of a more efficient machine. He chewed his pencil as he racked his brains, but the white drawing paper remained blank.

His technique had gradually improved during the past months with a considerable saving of time and effort. He had thrown out the shoddy mimeograph rollers, the only kind obtainable in the shops, and simply used a highly polished piece of bamboo to press the inked stencil on to the paper. He could now print about two thousand five hundred neat and clear copies in one night. He had devoted tremendous efforts to mixing the ink to the right consistency, and had visited all the stationery shops and experimented with all kinds of paper. Tireless, and wholly devoted to the Party, he was giving all his energy to the cause, and always endeavouring to do still

better. With the circulation increasing, he felt that a better machine was absolutely necessary so he decided to try and construct one himself.

"If it is to produce more quickly, I must first decide what form of motive power to use. . . . Electricity? . . . No! That's too expensive, and anyhow an electric motor would be too noisy. . . . Now if I use my feet. . . . That's it! I'll use pedal action. . . . And I might be able to fix the printing roller permanently and so free both my hands for other work. . . . Maybe it should act on the same principle as a printing press. . . ."

The vague outlines of an ingenious machine began to take shape in his mind. Something like a small pedal-action printing press. . . . Yes, that was just the thing! Cheng Kang could almost see it. He lowered his pencil to the clean sheet of drawing paper and was about to sketch his idea. The vision of the machine became indistinct, then completely vanished. The blank sheet of paper stared him in the face. Once more he had failed to capture the image of his ideal machine. His concept of the new design was not yet mature. . . .

A knock on the door made him start.

"Who is it?"

"It's me, Li Ching-yuan!"

Cheng Kang opened the door and took his visitor's hat.

Li Ching-yuan walked up to the table, wiping his glasses with his handkerchief.

"It's very late. What are you doing?" he asked as he peered at the words Cheng Kang had written on the top of the sheet. "So you're still working on the design for a duplicating machine!"

"I was trying. . . ."

"I don't like the way you carry on. You're always working and never rest. . . . Don't overstrain yourself and break down."

Cheng Kang chuckled, "I won't crack up. The more I work, the more energetic I feel."

"The two of you seem to be challenging each other," Li Ching-

yuan emphasized the words "the two of you." As he spoke he took a slip of paper from his waistcoat pocket and handed it to Cheng Kang. "Here's his reply."

"Ah, he's answered!"

Cheng Kang recalled that it had been on a warm evening like this that Li Ching-yuan, then dressed in a Western suit and wearing dark-rimmed eyeglasses, had first come to his home. Lao Li was a capable and judicious man. His grey-streaked hair testified to his years of struggle and his near-sighted eyes were inscrutable behind black-rimmed glasses. He was unusually reserved, his rare indications of emotion usually limited to a faint smile or a very expressive crinkling at the corners of his eyes. He did not talk much, and a few sentences sufficed to dispose of any question. He was very strict where work was concerned.

These days Cheng Kang received from him not stencils but sheaves of news bulletins. They were all exquisitely handwritten without any mistakes or omissions. It was obvious that the comrade in charge of monitoring the Hsinhua News Agency broadcasts was an able and devoted Party worker. Cheng Kang couldn't help wondering what kind of a person he was: Maybe he has an ordinary job like me in the daytime and does his secret work in the evening, sitting in his room beside his radio night after night with the volume turned low, straining to hear the broadcasts from the liberated area through the interference, taking them down and then copying them with his precise brush strokes. It must mean long hours of work every night, and never enough sleep, no Saturdays and Sundays off, year in and year out. . . .

Cheng Kang couldn't help asking to be allowed to send him a message. "I know that communicating and getting acquainted with each other are against the principles of underground work, but let me write just once to express my appreciation. I won't even sign my name!"

"Very well," agreed Li Ching-yuan. "But only this once, and

this is not to be regarded as a precedent. Write something very simple."

There was so much Cheng Kang wanted to say, but what could he put into one line? Finally he chose something simple and to the point: "Revolutionary greetings."

Cheng Kang spent the next few days anxiously awaiting a reply. Just what kind of a person was he? Young or old? A man or a woman? One point was absolutely certain: He was undoubtedly a very good comrade.

Cheng Kang eagerly took the note from Li Ching-yuan and unfolded it. It was one phrase: "A firm handshake."

"It's already half past eleven. I was held up by some business, so I'll stay here the night." Li Ching-yuan took out a roll of news bulletins and handed them to Cheng Kang.

"That's fine. You can have the bed, I'll sleep on the floor."

"We can both sleep in the bed, but first I want to help you a bit this evening. . . ." Li Ching-yuan changed the subject before he finished the sentence. "Tell me, what else are you thinking about besides designing a new duplicating machine? I can see there's something on your mind, so don't try and hide anything from me."

Cheng Kang had to tell him: "I was thinking that my work will be much lighter when the new machine is made, and maybe I could then take on some more work — say, the printing of *Attack*. . . ."

"That won't do," Li Ching-yuan shook his head firmly. "*Attack* and *Forward* cannot be done together. This is an organizational principle! If anything went wrong, it would mean the end of both."

Cheng Kang hesitated a moment. "Then what about letting me do the monitoring of the broadcasts? I can easily spare the time."

"How greedy you are! You've just written a letter of greetings to someone and now you want to do him out of his job! I saw through the workings of your mind long ago!" His rare

smile played around the corners of his eyes, but quickly vanished. "That won't be necessary. We'll talk about it later."

Li Ching-yuan seemed to be in an expansive mood, quite unlike his usual self. He lit a cigarette and paced up and down the room, smoking leisurely.

"Cheng Kang, I used to be like you — though never quite as robust. . . . In 1935, when I was in Nanking, I often worked right through the night, cutting stencils and duplicating. My health collapsed later in prison. . . . I will never forget how I'd sit up alone through the cold nights, listening to the north wind howling, as I cut stencils. There was no stove in the room, and winters in Nanking are not as mild as those in Chungking, you know. My hands would be numb with cold. . . . My old rattle-trap duplicating machine creaked and sounded particularly loud during the night. . . . There certainly is something special about underground printing work!"

He paused, recalling memories of old times. Then he continued: "The news received during the last two days is most encouraging. So I was thinking. . . . Let me help you cut a stencil! I want to see if I can do it as well as I used to; maybe I have lost my touch."

Cheng Kang quickly produced stylus, steel plate and stencil paper and stood watching while Li Ching-yuan sat down at the table, glanced through the news bulletins and started to write. He wrote with great ease in fluent Sung-style characters. His method of cutting stencils was different from Cheng Kang's. For a curved stroke, for example, he would lift the stylus and make it in two strokes instead of one and when lines intersected, he lightened the pressure on the stylus, and lifted it over the crossing. . . .

"So that's how it's done!" Cheng Kang watched Li Ching-yuan's nimble fingers, and saw that this method was superior to his own. A stencil cut by Li Ching-yuan was not likely to tear during the printing, many more copies could be printed from it, each word would be clearer and free from the blobs of ink where the strokes curved or crossed.

Cheng Kang pulled a document out of a secret drawer and slowly unfolded it under the lamp. It had been given to him by his elder brother two years before in Chungking. The mimeographing showed that it had been printed from an extremely well-cut stencil. On the first page was Chairman Mao's poem *Snow* written in Red Crag Village. It was done in Chairman Mao's calligraphic style and appeared so like the original that it was a joy to see. The striking headline read: "Smash Chiang Kai-shek's Offensive with a War of Self-Defence." The finely cut, bold headline and the minutely written characters all showed excellent stencil work. Cheng Kang had kept this document as a treasure these two long years for the inspiration and strength he derived from it. After he began producing the underground paper, he would compare his product with the document and improve his skill.

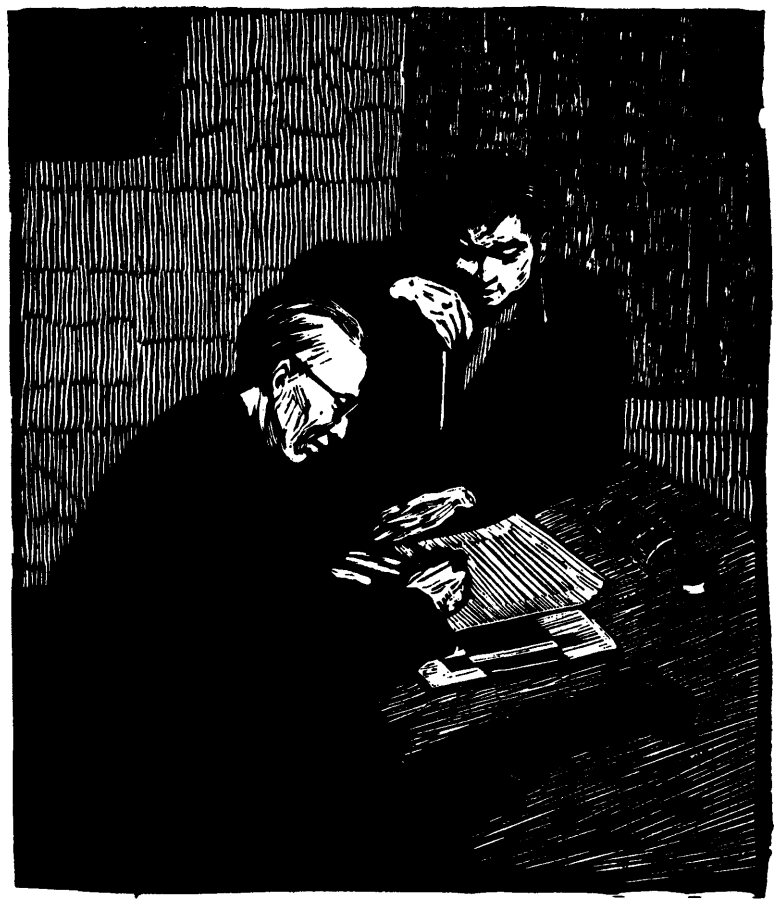
As he looked at it, his eyes suddenly cleared and he felt gratified. Except for what Lao Li had just said, Cheng Kang knew nothing about what work he had done before. But he did feel sure that this document from the East Szechuan Party Committee was made from a stencil done by Li himself!

Li Ching-yuan looked at the document in Cheng Kang's hand and guessed what thoughts were going through his mind. The corners of his eyes behind his glasses revealed a faint smile and his lips moved as though enunciating: "Cheng Kang, you never let an opportunity slip by," though he said not a single word. He just looked at Cheng Kang, slightly adjusted his glasses with his fingers and went back to his stencilling. The steady gliding of the stylus on the stencil paper was like music to their ears.

Cheng Kang could not of course know that as Li's hand moved the stylus his thoughts were far away, one scene after another flashing back in his mind.

. . . A dense fog blanketed the mountain city. The place was the familiar building housing the Communist Party office in Red Crag Village.

. . . A pair of thick dark eyebrows over bright penetrat-



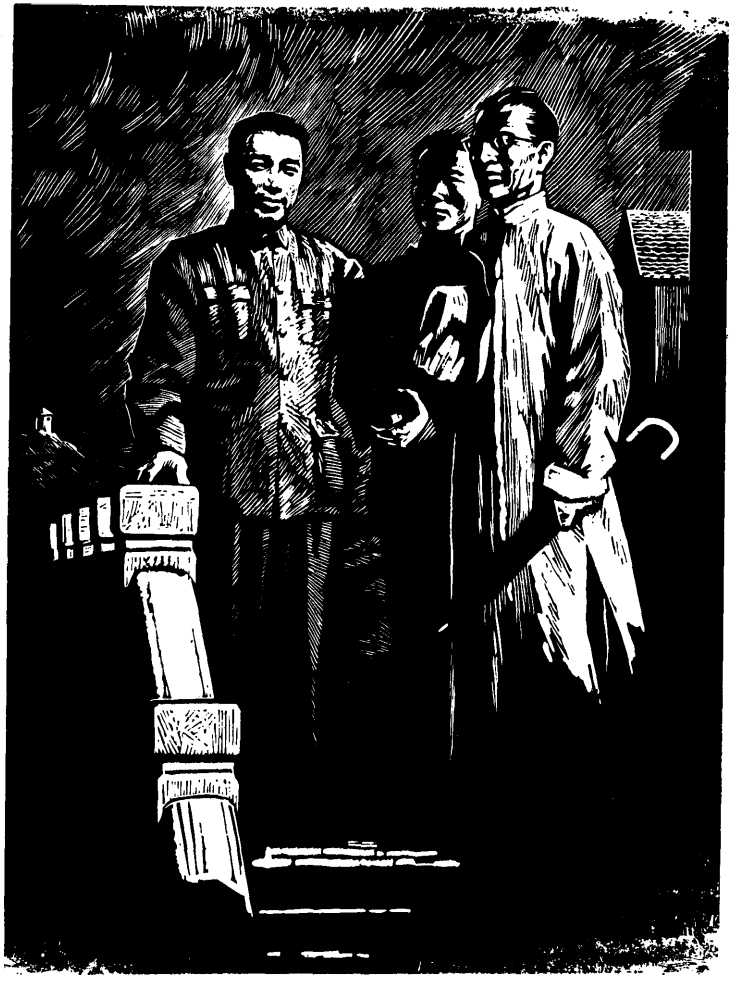
By Li Huan-min

ing eyes, clearly etched features in a face radiating spirit and warmth. This was the Secretary of the Party's South China Bureau, Comrade Chou En-lai. He was transmitting to an excited audience the Central Committee's notice concerning the Communist Party's peace negotiations with the Kuomintang, and announcing that Chairman Mao was coming to Chungking as the head of the Party's delegation. Comrade Chou En-lai also instructed the Chungking and the East Szechuan Party underground organizations to take every precautionary measure to ensure Chairman Mao's safety. As representative of the East Szechuan Party Committee, Li Ching-yuan had longed to see Chairman Mao. Now the Chairman was coming to Chungking and would stay in this building. But, like all the other comrades who heard Chou En-lai's report, he knew that his responsibility lay in protecting Chairman Mao, and so he left for his post.

. . . Massive dark clouds rolled across the skies. Chiang Kai-shek had shifted his vast armies to the frontlines of the civil war. The U.S.-Chiang reactionary clique was preparing to launch a surprise attack on our positions under the Central Plains command. Country-wide civil war was imminent, and our South China Bureau was soon to leave Red Crag Village. In the simply furnished, neat and clean meeting room in the building, Li Ching-yuan and the other comrades of the East Szechuan Party Committee were receiving instructions from the provincial Party committee secretary Wu Yu-chang concerning the current situation and tasks. As Li Ching-yuan was leaving, he heard Chou En-lai's strong voice: "Our Party led by Chairman Mao will surely smash Chiang Kai-shek's offensive by a war of self-defence." After seeing off some comrades, Chou En-lai noticed those of the East Szechuan Party Committee standing behind him, and he turned to shake hands with them. His warm handclasp and keen eyes gave them great encouragement. "You all know the situation now, don't you? Very good. You have a heavy responsibility." After shaking hands he insisted on seeing them to the door. "But this responsibility is not only yours and ours. It's the responsibility of the entire Party."

Standing on the height of the stone terrace outside the building, Comrade Chou En-lai scanned the dark clouds and the hillsides dotted near and far with the sentry posts of the enemy agents. He then turned to those around him and said as if also to himself: "The South China Bureau has worked in Chungking for eight years through storm and stress. Tomorrow it will move to Nanking and Shanghai. We have upheld Chairman Mao's policy of the national united front for resisting Japan, and have not been hindered by any stumbling blocks nor snared by any traps. We have eventually defeated Japanese imperialism and the forces of the people's revolution have expanded as never before. Now it appears that the South China Bureau won't be able to remain in Nanking or Shanghai long. It may have to move into the mountains. But the reactionaries always underestimate the strength of the people and overestimate their own. They have made full preparations for a civil war and are about to embark on a nation-wide offensive. I still remember the time after the failure of the revolution in 1927, especially the winter of 1931 when we withdrew to the mountains. We wondered when the revolution would succeed and we would come back. It was rather difficult to say then, for everything seemed uncertain. But we feel different now. As long as we carry out Chairman Mao's directives, unite the whole Party, defy hardship and fight on, we will defeat the vicious attacks of Chiang Kai-shek in several years of bitter war. From the looks of things, we will in all probability return in three or five years. So long, Chungking, but we shall be back!"

. . . After saying goodbye to Comrade Chou En-lai, the comrades separated in a driving rainstorm to carry out their assignments. That night Li Ching-yuan crossed the swollen Chialing River in a small sampan. Then, while painstakingly stencilling that document in a building near the river, he recalled the instruction of the South China Bureau transmitted by Wu Yu-chang. The words of Vice-Chairman Chou still rang in his ears: "Szechuan is a key centre of the U.S.-Chiang reactionary clique. It is the main supply base for their soldiers, grain



By Wu Fan

and war matériel. Your struggle here will have an exceptionally important bearing on the course of the war. You must make sure that you rely on the masses and mobilize them. You should be prepared against any eventuality. . . ."

The mimeographed document in Cheng Kang's hand had set off in Li Ching-yuan's mind a train of recollections leading his thoughts directly to the current situation. A comrade from the South China Bureau had recently arrived to relay the bureau's instruction that, as a diversionary tactic against the enemy at the front, the Party Underground in the cities should give more support to the armed struggle in the countryside. Following up the instruction, the East Szechuan Party Committee decided to send Li to join the Chungking Municipal Party Committee and be responsible for a part of its work in order to keep a tab on the situation in Chungking and strengthen the leadership there. It was he who notified Sister Chiang to go to the countryside. Cheng Kang, Lao Hsu and Sister Chiang only knew part of Li Ching-yuan's responsibilities as a member of the municipal Party committee, but none of them knew him as the leader of the East Szechuan Party Committee. The comrade from the South China Bureau related another piece of information. Vice-Chairman Chou En-lai was helping Chairman Mao lead the people's War of Liberation while at the same time concerning himself with the Party Underground in the Kuomintang-occupied areas. Li Ching-yuan could see in his mind's eye Chou En-lai standing by Chairman Mao, and he still remembered clearly the Vice-Chairman's parting words: "From the looks of things, we will in all probability return in three or five years. So long, Chungking, but we shall be back!"

Strictly obeying organizational discipline, Cheng Kang asked no question about that document which he was sure Li had stencilled. All Cheng Kang could do was to silently admire the superb quality of Li Ching-yuan's calligraphy and stencilling.

"How well you write!" Cheng Kang was spellbound and moved closer to Li Ching-yuan until their heads almost touched. He could now make out what was the subject matter of the writing. It was news about a stirring victory! No wonder he was elated that evening. He had wanted to have a hand in bringing the good news to the people of this mountain city.

Li Ching-yuan felt the point of the stylus which had become blunted by rubbing against the steel plate. "This type of stylus is no good, the steel is not tempered enough," he remarked. "Phonograph needles are made of better metal and you can get finer and clearer strokes on your stencils . . . just try it. All you have to do is blunt them a bit." Li Ching-yuan continued to concentrate on his writing. The silence of the room was broken only by the sharp systematic scratching of the stylus on the steel plate. . . .

Li Ching-yuan completed the stencilling of the headlines in big letters right under the title of the paper. Cheng Kang read in a voice quivering with emotion:

"Victory on Northwest Battle Front. Yenan Recovered!"

The hearts of these two comrades-in-arms beat high with exultation. . . . They worked and talked together until day dawned. The rare and precious spring night passed swiftly!

The sun was shining and Li Ching-yuan was about to leave.

"I've something to tell you," he said. "This is the last edition of *Forward* you are to produce."

Cheng Kang stared at him in surprise. "Why?"

Then Li Ching-yuan told him the reasons for this decision. The municipal Party committee was planning to expand its circulation and switch over to metal-type printing. Moreover, the production of a paper in the same place for a long time increased the risk of exposure. The enemy was paying closer attention to the activities of the underground Party organization, and had recently set up a new secret service organ. . . .

Cheng Kang gazed pleadingly at Li Ching-yuan: "*Forward* is being properly duplicated. . . . Can I be transferred to do the printing?"

Li Ching-yuan slowly replied: "The enemy is stepping up armament production and the struggle at the plants is getting sharper. The Party plans to give you an important task. . . . I'll tell you the details the next time we meet. Wind up your present work as quickly as possible and get ready to take up new duties!" Li Ching-yuan made a calculation. "Today is Thursday. Complete the duplicating of this last issue of *Forward* by the week-end. I'll send someone to get them at 12 a.m. sharp, Sunday."

"I'll have them ready on time," answered Cheng Kang briskly.

6

THE building loomed big and sombre against the overcast night sky, its windows blacked out by thick curtains. It looked like a huge monster crouching in the dark, ready to pounce and kill.

One or two lorries occasionally sped by, their headlights momentarily lighting up the doorplate: No. 32, Old Street. Inside the building, morse operators in sound-proof rooms tapped out coded information to distant secret receiving stations. The voices of radio operators rose above the clicking keys: "Calling No. 214! No. 214! . . ."

"Final decision pending detailed report. . . ." A radio operator mechanically repeated the official decision on a secret document.

". . . immediately investigate activities of said organization . . . continue secret supervision. . . ."

Twenty-four hours a day coded messages and signals from here directed secret service operations over the vast area of the southwestern provinces of Szechuan, Sikang, Yunnan and Kweichow.

A large tablet hung over the imposing iron gates of this house. It bore the words "Abode of Benevolence," which might have led one to believe that this was the residence of some highly-placed personage but the numerous guards gave the building the forbidding appearance of a government office. The building housed part of the Kuomintang's Bureau of Military and Administrative Affairs of the Southwest. It was known to the public as the Second Department of the Southwest Bureau and seemed no different from any other organ of political power, but it was really the Southwest China headquarters of the Bureau of Confidential Information, directly under the Kuomintang Ministry of Defence. In order to conceal its real function as far as possible, it was necessary to use a name like "Abode of Benevolence," the kind of name usually reserved for private mansions.

This secret service organization covered Southwest China like a huge spider's web. All the secret service units and posts in the region were linked together by invisible but close-knit meshes, forming one enormous net of terror. This sinister building was the centre of these innumerable strands, the gloomy abode of the poisonous spider which had created the hideous web. The slightest breeze was enough to set its filaments aquiver and to provoke swift and violent reactions.

The operations of the huge, invisible network were not decided by the secret agents always ready for action anywhere at any time, nor by the executioners who interrogated prisoners under torture, nor by the wireless operators tapping keys. The hustle and bustle of activity in the building, the liaison and command work for raids and arrests — all was controlled and master-minded by the poisonous spider and by him alone, the spider who at this moment was crouching motionless in an office on the third storey.

In the light of a desk-lamp a gross middle-aged man was sitting in a swivel-chair. His swarthy face was expressionless, his heavy jowls clean-shaven and his eyes bulged under thick eyebrows. The writing-brush in his hand moved over a stack of papers. He was the central figure, the power that controlled all the activities of the web. A major-general's golden plum blossom insignia gleamed on the collar of his khaki uniform.

His office was furnished with carpets, armchairs, a tea-table and crystal ashtrays. Potted plants stood in the corners, the walls were covered with military maps and his huge black desk was in the middle of the room.

He was studying official papers on which he jotted down decisions which would shortly become orders, commands, radio messages, operations . . . and streams of fresh blood.

Piercing screams came through a half-open door.

"Are you going to talk? Talk, curse you!"

"Who is your leader? Answer me!"

There was the sound of whips whistling through the air and thudding on naked flesh. . . .

The man in the swivel-chair straightened up, and lit a cigarette. Slowly blowing out smoke-rings, he listened to the cries, the faintest hint of a smile playing around his lips. To him the screams of the tortured were like music.

He was used to this life. A lull in the groans and shrieks, and a feeling of emptiness and fear would overtake him. Without interrogations under torture he would have lacked a sense of his own existence and power. In this world there are people, or rather bloodthirsty monsters, who make killing their profession. This secret agent had been wallowing in human blood for many years. As one of the closest associates of Mao Jen-feng — the head of the MIB and Director of the Bureau of Confidential Information — he was an important man among the top-ranking secret agents. Without him, the operatives downstairs would be idle, the executioners would have no one to torture, and the ether would be less disturbed by radio waves. He had many official designations, but to put it precisely, he was Major-General Hsu Peng-fei, Chief of the Second Department of the Southwest Bureau, concurrently Director of the Security Department, a leading figure in the MIB, and the master mind in this building. His present rank was only limited by the fact that no one in the organization was allowed to supersede the rank of the former big boss of the MIB, the notorious Tai Li, who died wearing the insignia of major-general. Otherwise, it was highly possible that Hsu's rank would have been higher.

He heard a car coming, probably it was bringing in the people he had ordered to be arrested a few hours ago. . . . Hsu Peng-fei listened to the sounds of the building. All was the reflection of his will; everything proceeded according to his bidding. He lit another cigarette and took out some papers from a pile of documents. They were the minutes of an important meeting which had been presided over by Chu Shao-liang, Director of

the Southwest Bureau. Hsu Peng-fei laid the minutes on the pile of papers he had already disposed of, then picked them up and carefully went over them again. Feelings of triumph mounted in him.

> . . . With a view to placing our forces under unified command for the speedy capture of the ringleaders of the Communist bandits, who are organizing strikes, sabotaging arms production, disrupting the sources of conscripts and military provisions, inciting popular uprisings and menacing the security of Chungking, the Bureau of Military and Administrative Affairs of the Southwest ordered the establishment of the Security Department. The directorship of the department to be assumed by Hsu Peng-fei, the vice-directorships by Yen Tsui and Shen Yang-chai. In the pursuance of intensive investigations and arrests, they were to command all troops, police, gendarmes and secret service personnel.
>
> The mail investigation teams were ordered to examine closely and report on all cases of *Forward* sent through the mail. Secret service men to be stationed at all post offices and mail boxes to arrest the dispatchers of this paper.
>
> Rigorous searches to be conducted for subversive books and publications. Leftist individuals in the cultural and newspaper circles to be placed under observation.
>
> Secret agents to infiltrate into the democratic parties and utilize all methods which might enable them to approach the underground organizations of the Communist Party.
>
> In co-ordination with the Bandit Suppression Forces intensive searches and arrests to be carried out in the Mount Huaying district. Every effort should be made to uncover the organizational structure of the Communist Party.
>
> The policing of factories and mines will be increased, with especial attention to armament plants. . . .

It was at this conference that he had been appointed director of the newly-established Security Department and vested with special powers to direct all troops, police, gendarmes and secret service personnel. Naturally, Hsu Peng-fei was particularly gratified as his position was now higher than that of Yen Tsui, his great rival. It had been a stroke of luck. He had been given the new powers because Yen Tsui headed a "secret" department and was consequently unsuited for a position in the public eye. On the other hand, he had been in charge of the "non-secret" Second Department. The system of parallel secret and non-secret organizations had always been employed inside the MIB for the purpose of strengthening secret service activities through

mutual co-ordination and supervision. Hsu Peng-fei was, of course, aware that the difference between the two types of organization was merely superficial. Actually, he got his new position because Chu Shao-liang wanted to ingratiate himself with Mao Jen-feng. Hsu Peng-fei knew that he personally could not compare with Yen Tsui either in seniority or in reputation. Yen Tsui had been the blue-eyed boy of the late Tai Li; when Hsu Peng-fei was still a lieutenant-colonel, Yen Tsui was already a major-general, chief of the General Affairs Department of the MIB and of the SACO* headquarters. However, Yen Tsui was self-willed and conceited and had always been at loggerheads with Mao Jen-feng. So after Tai Li died he had gone downhill when Mao Jen-feng was made Director of the Bureau of Confidential Information. Yen Tsui had been removed from his position as head of the General Affairs Department and relegated to the post of Director of Southwest Special District of the MIB in charge of its secret units there. Thus Hsu Peng-fei, formerly Mao Jen-feng's confidential secretary, came to be on an equal footing with the late Tai Li's favourite. Now, Hsu Peng-fei had been given a further promotion, and Yen Tsui had been reduced to vice-director of the Security Department.

However, since becoming director of the Security Department, Hsu Peng-fei had become increasingly dissatisfied with Yen Tsui's arrogant and unco-operative attitude. The Southwest Special District headed by Yen Tsui controlled all the personnel and equipment at SACO headquarters, and the U.S. Advisory Department paid particular attention to its work. It was clear what Yen Tsui was up to. He intended to use the powerful resources at his disposal to work independently and leave Hsu Peng-fei out in the cold. True enough, he had to contend with Shen Yang-chai, who was vice-director of the Southwest Special District Headquarters, and a favourite of Mao Jen-feng's. He had graduated from the Whampoa Military Academy in the same class as Hsu Peng-fei, and the two had been close friends

* The Sino-American Co-operation Organization.

for many years. Everyone knew that Mao Jen-feng had placed Shen Yang-chai at the Southwest Special District Headquarters to keep watch on Yen Tsui. But Yen Tsui always kept his activities a carefully guarded secret, especially from Shen Yang-chai. It was quite possible that Yen Tsui had already got some sort of information about the Communist Underground through his secret sources. Perhaps he had even found a workable lead!

Hsu Peng-fei did not care to think too much about this. He laid the document aside and dismissed the idea, doubting Yen Tsui's ability to do better than himself. In this battle of wits with the Communists, even the sly and treacherous Yen Tsui would not necessarily come out the victor. However, what worried Hsu Peng-fei most was not Yen Tsui's deliberately obstructive attitude, but the fact that the Communists' activities were so cleverly planned and astutely carried out that he had been unable to get hold of a single useful clue.

Hsu Peng-fei's confidential secretary pushed open the door, and brought in a batch of important papers for his consideration. Not daring to disturb his superior when he was so deep in thought, he laid them on the desk and began to tiptoe out again.

Without raising his head, Hsu Peng-fei suddenly asked: "Are there any important intelligence reports?"

"There's a letter from General Chu Shao-liang." The secretary hesitated a second and lowered his voice. "The Investigation Section has found out that Yen Tsui is very chummy with the newly-appointed American Special Adviser. . . ."

"What?" questioned Hsu Peng-fei, his eyes blazing fiercely. Then he quickly calmed down and simply said: "Continue investigations."

Hsu Peng-fei picked up a paper from the new pile. It was the report of an intelligence-collecting competition which required his signature and instructions. He glanced through it briefly and added his comment:

> Instructions on the intelligence report competition that has been held during the first quarter of this year are on record. March is nearly at an end, and a review of the reports received during the past two months reveals that. . . .

Here Hsu Peng-fei hesitated a moment, and then vented his dissatisfaction in big block letters:

> Both their quality and quantity are most unsatisfactory and no progress has been made. Is it worth holding a competition only to get such meagre results? Our responsibilities for the suppression of the Communist insurrections are particularly great. It is hoped that you will urge your subordinates to put forth greater efforts and work more conscientiously, so that better results are achieved!

He read it over again. "Quality and quantity most unsatisfactory," "no progress" — that was his biggest headache. He cursed those useless morons and felt like flinging them into the nearest cell! He stretched out his hand towards a button on his desk. His instructions could be carried out in a few minutes. Just as his finger was about to press the button, he withdrew it. Picking up the official dispatch, he threw it to one side and picked up another. It was an urgent and confidential memorandum contained in an envelope on which was printed in big red letters "From the Southwest Bureau of Military and Administrative Affairs." In the blank space Chu Shao-liang had written his surname in bold handwriting. Hsu Peng-fei cut open the envelope with difficulty. He was nervous. And his face slowly darkened as he read the contents.

> . . . The higher authorities have repeatedly set time-limits for the destruction of the leading organ of the Communist Party. There has not, however, been the slightest progress since the establishment of the Security Department, whereas the activities of the Communists are becoming increasingly serious. Arms production in Chungking has shown no turn for the better. Repercussions from the fire at the Artillery Plant are still spreading. Repeated explosions have occurred at ammunition dumps. Student riots and grain riots are continually flaring up in Chengtu, Kweiyang, Kunming and Chungking. Armed bands of Communists in Yunnan, Kweichow, Szechuan and Sikang are taking advantage of our shortage of military forces in the rear, and are carrying out raids with complete self-assurance. Anti-conscription and anti-grain levy riots in the Mount Huaying district of northern Szechuan have reached such proportions that the sources of conscripts and grain have virtually dried up.
>
> The reports coming in are highly alarming. Should this situation continue for any length of time, the prospects for the Southwest will be a cause of great concern. I have already informed Mao Jen-feng of this situation. I have recently again received a personal directive from the Generalissimo,* ordering you to clear the matter up without delay. . . .

"There's a phone call for you, sir." An orderly's voice roused Hsu Peng-fei from his gloomy silence. He picked up the receiver and grunted into it before bursting out shouting:

"What? The mail inspection team has found more copies of *Forward*? . . . Who mailed them? Eh?"

Hsu Peng-fei exploded: "What! You couldn't find out?"

The desperate explanation which followed exasperated him even further and he thundered: "The Generalissimo has ordered you to find the hide-out of *Forward* within three days. . . . If you fail you will answer for it with your life!"

In a black fury, Hsu Peng-fei flung the receiver on the table.

As usual, glaringly bright lights lit up the first floor, and screams and curses went on unabated.

Hsu Peng-fei had now lost his interest in the music of torture. Ever since the setting up of the Security Department elusive, infuriating incidents had plagued him. Explosions kept on occurring at the arsenals and on landing-craft transporting ammunition. Copies of *Forward* cropped up all over the place. A bunch of tattered school teachers had actually had the audacity to demonstrate right in front of the Southwest Bureau. He could almost visualize Chu Shao-liang telling Mao Jen-feng how inefficient he was and see his irate superiors glaring at him. One of these days he might be subjected to a much more severe reprimand than any of those which he administered to terrify his own subordinates. Fingers of cold fear clutched at his heart as he stared at the sombre wall in front of him. The ticking of his watch awakened him from his stupor. It was past midnight. The radio room was silent but the sound of cross-examinations continued. . . .

What was the use of all the bustle, all the torturing? What was the point of all this noise! If he did not find something substantial this time, then . . . then all was over with him, and

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* Chiang Kai-shek.

the consequences for him would be as frightening as the collapse of the front lines in the civil war! Hsu Peng-fei pushed his chair back violently, his face reflecting the frustration and the uncontrollable fear which tore at him. He stood for a while, and then left his desk, opened the door and walked out.

The sound of shrieks and roars drew his steps towards one of the cross-examination rooms. Inside, the air was thick and foul. A man of about thirty years was lashed face upwards to a bench. On one side of the room was a brazier, and several men were thrusting heated irons at the victim's breast. Ignoring this scene, Hsu Peng-fei walked over to the window and threw it open, jerking aside the curtains. He needed a breath of fresh air. A fine drizzle blew in, cooling his face and somewhat easing his agitation.

The screams of the tortured man behind him were followed by the splash of water. Hsu Peng-fei turned around.

"Who is it?"

"The one from Yunyang County."

"It's three days already. Why doesn't he talk?"

"He'll start soon. He's already cracking up. I'll let him have it once more."

The unconscious man gradually regained his senses. He watched the shadows before him with terror-stricken eyes, his breath rasping in his throat. . . .

Hsu Peng-fei stepped forward with mixed feelings of hope and despair.

"What is your position?"

As the man stared at the major-general's golden plum blossom on Hsu Peng-fei's collar he tried to shrink away. Foaming at the mouth, he muttered in a trembling voice:

"Member of the County Council. . . ."

"I'm asking you what's your position in the Party!" Hsu Peng-fei shouted, stamping his foot.

"Position in the Party?" The man glanced at the Chief of Operations standing beside Hsu Peng-fei, then shut his eyes

hopelessly. "It's just as he says . . . Secretary of the County Committee."

The victim's cracked lips trembled uncontrollably.

"Untie him!" snapped Hsu Peng-fei and crossing his hands behind his back, he stalked into the corridor. From the look of things, the man's tongue had been loosened. So there were weaklings in the Communist Party too! Heaven grant that he come across more of them!

Hsu Peng-fei's accumulated worries dissipated a little in the cold and bracing air of the corridor. He had a particular fondness for this part of the building, especially at night. As he saw it, men of his profession had a close affinity with the night and the deeds associated with it. They had to be bold, astute and ruthless, and have a deep insight into a man's psychological and physiological weaknesses. They had to know the weak points in a man's private life. They had to be flexible enough to use any means that would achieve their results and know how to demoralize their victims with lightning blows from the least expected quarters. This, in fact, was the secret of his ascendancy over his colleagues, of his successful career.

Standing at a window, Hsu Peng-fei gazed at the slumbering city outlined against the mountain-side by the electric lights which flickered here and there. Many were the times that the cold air of this corridor had boosted his spirits. Would it do the same for him tonight? As he stared into the darkness, however, fear and uncertainty filled his heart. . . .

An old man, trembling from head to foot, was being taken into another interrogation room. As he passed, Hsu Peng-fei remained still, but made a sign to indicate that the iron door of the room be left open. In this way he could follow the proceedings. He heard Chief Interrogator Chu Chieh, asking in stern, ponderous tones:

"What is your name?"

"Your — your Honour, my n-name is Chiang."

"What is your given name?" The voice was slightly more severe as he asked this second question.

"They . . . they call me Uncle Chiang."

A fist pounded the table. "Your given name!"

"My g-given name is Ping-chang. . . ."

"How old are you?"

"I reached sixty last year . . . I'm sixty-one now."

Hsu Peng-fei was annoyed by the rambling questions and answers but Chu Chieh's next question was like a sudden knife thrust:

"When did you join the Party?"

". . . in 1936, the 25th year of the Re-Republic."

A series of questions and answers followed, all of which Hsu Peng-fei listened to with great interest.

"Who was your sponsor?"

"The Chief Dragon of our society, Uncle Wang Chiu-ling, he. . . ."

"What procedure did you go through?"

"I — I handed in three photographs. I don't remember now, maybe it was four. Afterwards I was given a membership card. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei was startled. Did the Communist Party issue membership cards? This was news to him.

"What activities did you take part in?"

"There weren't any — any activities. . . ."

"Liar!"

"Your — your Honour, we only drank t-tea in my teashop, s-settled disputes, c-collected subscriptions on the w-wharves. . . ."

On the wharves? Was he in the workers' movement? Hsu Peng-fei's agile mind turned the question over without jumping to conclusions.

"Your motive for joining the Party?"

"I didn't have any m-motive."

A sharp rap on the table. "You're lying."

"I — I was tricked into it by Uncle Wang Chiu-ling. . . . He — he said it was b-best to join. He said it was very big and powerful. He also said m-my name was Ch-Chiang, just like

the Generalissimo's . . . and the National Army had entered Szechuan, so it was b-best to join. . . . I listened to Uncle Wang, so I — I joined. . . ."

"You . . . you —" Chu Chieh's tone of voice suddenly changed, and he asked in a panic: "What party did you join? Answer, quick!"

"I — I'm not certain myself . . . I think Uncle Wang said it was called the Kuo-Kuomintang!"

"Damn it!" swore Hsu Peng-fei. They kept on dragging in all this unaccountable rubbish. This couldn't go on! He strode back to his office in a rage, stamping as he went.

He forced himself to sit at his desk. The table-lamp threw its light on his angry, worried face as he aimlessly went through the piles of official documents which now seemed pointless. He came across a letter which he had already read. It was from Shen Yang-chai, an old friend of his who lived in the officers' quarters at SACO. It was understandable that he was feeling depressed, as he did not get along with his superior Yen Tsui. But Hsu Peng-fei had not expected such a gloomy letter, full of complaints and lacking even the customary greetings. Shen Yang-chai could hardly be blamed. Who didn't feel worried with the whole Kuomintang edifice tottering and their own positions going with it! The thought of his own circumstances made Hsu Peng-fei feel much the same way.

Tossing the letter aside, Hsu Peng-fei caught sight of an unopened dispatch from the gendarmerie. He picked it up, and weighed it in his hand, wondering whether its contents were good or bad. He slowly opened it, and as his eyes scanned the first line, his face froze.

"Regarding the execution of the criminals guilty of committing arson at the Artillery Plant of the Yangtze Ordnance Works. . . ."

The words became blurred, and a numbing pain shot through his heart, a deep pain that had been troubling him for days, and which recurred whenever he was reminded of his own failure. He felt like a general defeated through his own negli-

gence and faced with suicide as the only means of retrieving his honour. He had put off making the decision about the execution of those two secret agents, but the after-effects of the fire had spread, causing disturbances among workers and students throughout the city, and had culminated in a great wave of protest. But for that, he would certainly not have had to mete out such a severe punishment on the incendiaries whom the workers had caught. He thought of the events which had led up to this. Some time back, the artillery plant workers had refused to pull down their homes to make room for the expansion of the plant, and had gone on strike. As this had affected the carrying out of the plans for increasing arms production, he had been reprimanded by the Ministry of Defence. Staking everything on one last throw, he had ordered his men to set fire to the workers' shacks in the hope that this would force them to give in.

He had expected that the impact and suddenness of this harsh measure would bring the results he wanted. But things had not turned out the way he had anticipated. The workers had refused to be cowed, and the factory had had to compensate them for their losses, and revise its plans for expansion.

The protest campaign, so far from showing signs of losing momentum, was still growing in scope and intensity. The pressure for investigations into the arson plot was reaching unprecedented proportions. This caused Hsu Peng-fei deep anxiety and he had a premonition of worse to come. If he did not make this painful sacrifice at once, who knew what would happen next. He was aware that unless he took drastic measures to allay popular indignation, he would not be able to extricate himself from this mess. There was no alternative to sacrificing his two underlings.

He forced himself to pick up the brush, with which he always signed official papers. It seemed to have become intolerably heavy. He avoided looking at the contents of the dispatch and the names of the subordinates he was sending to their deaths.

He hurriedly scrawled: Execute in public immediately to allay popular indignation.

He cast the brush aside, the paper slipped out of his nervous fingers and fluttered into a corner. Despair swept over him. He seemed to see countless people in the know, all laughing at him for his incompetence. Among them was the Director of the Southwest Bureau who had written the threatening phrases, "the Generalissimo's personal order" — "I have already informed Mao Jen-feng" — etc., and there was also his pock-marked rival Yen Tsui. . . . He fell back weakly in his chair. He felt like an animal who had lost a fight to the death while others of his own kind lurked around, waiting with malicious joy for his destruction.

The voice of a subordinate startled Hsu Peng-fei out of his gloomy thoughts. He must appear calm and authoritative, and never let anyone see him in his moments of weakness. His eyes, dull and listless a few seconds ago, now became sharp and penetrating. He hurriedly picked up the dispatch from the floor and returned it to its envelope.

"Come in!" he called. His voice was stern, as if nothing had happened to disturb him.

The Chief of Operations handed him the records of the cross-examination and then stood to attention. He said: "It's all there! He has confessed to everything!"

Hsu Peng-fei casually leafed through the statement of the man who had been cross-examined. The Chief of Operations waited in respectful silence.

"What! The chief of police too? . . ."

"Yes!" He hastened to add: "The chief of police at Yun-yang, the chief councillor, three section heads in the county government, the principal of the middle school and the chief of the county court all are Communists! We'll make a clean sweep this time!"

"The chief of the county court?" Hsu Peng-fei slowly repeated, "and the chief of police?" It was a bit too much to believe.

"He volunteered all this himself. He also said that the chief of police was to organize an armed uprising!"

"I seem to recall that, in addition to being on the county council, he was also a member of the Communist Extermination Committee in Yunyang."

"He said that the Communists had ordered him to infiltrate into it. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei refrained from further comment and laid the statement aside. He had to sort out all the thoughts rushing through his mind.

"I also attached a suggestion, sir. . . ."

"So I see," replied Hsu Peng-fei coldly.

On a sudden decision Hsu Peng-fei picked up his brush and below the Chief of Operations' suggestion wrote:

"Permission granted. Arrest everyone!"

He looked up and rapped out an order. "Tell Chu Chieh to get a confession out of that old fellow Chiang. He's to say that he is the head of the organizational department of the Communist Party's Yunyang county committee."

The Chief of Operations swelled with pride. Such a big haul was rare indeed. They had netted the secretary of the Communist Party's county committee, and the case was assuming larger proportions. It was some achievement for one night's work. He had laid bare the entire Communist Party organization of a county! Hsu Peng-fei had even agreed to charter a special vessel and dispatch a battalion of troops. Why, the operational expenses would come to quite a tidy sum, not to mention the reward he was sure to get later on!

The Chief of Operations was quite unaware that Hsu Peng-fei saw the matter in quite a different light and didn't believe a word of the confessions obtained under torture. Who had ever heard of such amenable Communist Party secretaries? And who had ever heard of the chief of police, the chief of the county court and the chief councillor, of one county, all being Communists? This case from Yunyang was obviously the result of some internal dissension and backstabbing among the

local authorities. Hsu Peng-fei had other motives for giving his assent to the arrests. For a long time he had failed to get his hands on a single worthwhile clue to the activities of the Communist Underground and his superiors were pressing him hard. He was at his wits' end. Now this statement had fallen into his hands. It was something to act upon. Even if the real facts came out later, he had this to fall back on and that old muddlehead Chiang for good measure. There would be no lack of scapegoats. He would report to his superiors that he had uncovered the whole Communist Party organization in the county, and thus ease his present hopeless position.

The Chief of Operations had already left the room with his instructions, but Hsu Peng-fei was too deep in thought to notice this. He had gained a breathing spell. But how was he to deploy all the troops, police, gendarmes and secret agents in the city? He racked his brains but could find no solution.

The telephone rang for some time, before Hsu Peng-fei picked up the receiver. As soon as he heard the voice at the other end, he became rather angry and spoke in a mildly reproving voice:

"Shen Yang-chai, I've read your letter. You've been a little too depressed lately."

Hsu Peng-fei's eyes widened, as he jumped to his feet and shouted, "What? What do you say? Yen Tsui has already got an important lead on the Communist Underground?"

The voice from the other end was almost inaudible. There was a lot of interference on the line and Hsu Peng-fei guessed that it wasn't convenient for Shen Yang-chai to speak any louder. He impatiently fired a series of questions.

"You say Yen Tsui started to work on it long ago? . . . Where did he get this lead? What?"

". . . . . ."

Alarm and frustration took possession of Hsu Peng-fei. How mean this rival was, and how cunning! He hadn't let drop a single hint, planning to take all the credit himself! But Hsu Peng-fei was even more troubled at the thought that someone

else had managed to get hold of a clue, while he had nothing of any real use. He collapsed despairingly in his chair. The telephone receiver fell from his hand, and the room seemed to sway as he was overcome by waves of dizziness.

Li Chi-kang was very puzzled. Why had Shen Yang-chai, the Vice-Director of Special District Headquarters, phoned him personally? Why should Shen want to see him just now when Director Yen Tsui was out on an inspection tour? Why had he been asked to go to the Second Department instead of to Special District Headquarters? He turned these questions over in his mind, but could find no satisfactory explanation. Yet the note of stern command in the vice-director's voice made him feel he dared not disobey.

Li Chi-kang picked up his law textbooks, just as he did every day when he went to lectures or to read in the teahouse, and strolled out of Chungking University towards the Shapingpa bus station.

About an hour later, he arrived at No. 32, Old Street. His old rival Wei Chi-po met him courteously at the "Abode of Benevolence." They had been together at the SACO Training Class, but after graduation Li Chi-kang went to Special District Headquarters, and Wei Chi-po was assigned to the Second Department. Later on, both had been sent to Chungking University, once more becoming "schoolmates." However, each had had his own mission and they pretended not to know each other. Now, Wei Chi-po had been transferred to the Second Department from the gendarmerie. He radiated well-being and was dressed in American military uniform. But Li Chi-kang, with his shabby blue gown out at the elbows, and those wretched old textbooks under his arm, looked like a poor student.

He was about to pass with a nod when Wei Chi-po came up to him, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Congratulations, friend, congratulations!"

"What for?" Li Chi-kang was mystified.

"I must apologize for the beating-up you took last time — I must admit it was my fault. But as it turns out I did you a favour after all."

Li Chi-kang smiled coldly. "We each do our jobs."

Wei Chi-po nodded and said confidentially: "Department Chief Hsu wants to see you."

"Department Chief Hsu?"

"Yes! Look, friend, if you strike it rich, don't forget your old pal who's been waiting for you here at the order of the Department Chief."

While talking, Wei Chi-po led Li Chi-kang to Hsu Peng-fei's office where the vice-director Shen Yang-chai was sitting in an armchair. To judge from the heap of cigarette ends in the ashtray, he must have been there quite a long time. Hsu Peng-fei greeted Li Chi-kang genially. Wei Chi-po offered him a cigarette and then brought tea. Li Chi-kang was alarmed by so cordial a reception on the part of Hsu Peng-fei: it must mean important business which evidently had something to do with him.

They all sat down. Hsu Peng-fei went straight to the point and asked Li Chi-kang a question that was both mocking and searching.

"How is your work at the Shaping bookshop coming along?"

Li Chi-kang's heart skipped a beat. How had Hsu Peng-fei got wind of Yen Tsui's most closely-guarded secret? Yen Tsui had repeatedly cautioned him never to let anyone know about this matter, and to be especially careful to keep the Second Department out of it. Li Chi-kang dared not give a direct answer, neither could he cross Hsu Peng-fei, so he stalled:

"What orders have you for me?"

"Orders? Nothing much," replied Hsu Peng-fei, then he roared with laughter. "So Yen Tsui helps Cheng Ke-chang to send out copies of *Forward*! The director of Special District Headquarters is actually a tool of the Communists! What a joke!"

Li Chi-kang was dumbfounded. Hsu Peng-fei had even

found out that Cheng Ke-chang had helped Chen Sung-lin with the posting of *Forward.* He shivered with apprehension.

"Still trying to keep me in the dark, are you? Well, how about putting me in the picture?" Li Chi-kang looked at his awe-inspiring superior, not daring to answer.

"To be quite candid with you, I uncovered the Communists long ago," Hsu Peng-fei's manner changed. Completely self-assured, he scrutinized Li Chi-kang's face, and before Li could recover from his surprise, he continued: "Without going into details, I assure you that I was onto *Forward* before you. The mail inspection team seized two letters from Chikiang. They found that the handwriting was the same as that in *Forward.* We found our quarry a month ago and have also located their radio station. There's no doubt that they have links with the leading organs of the Communist Party. I intend to finish off this case without delay!

"My purpose in sending for you, before leaving for Chikiang, is to compare notes and analyse the situation so that I won't interfere with your department's work once I get started."

Li Chi-kang was at a loss for words. He was suspicious of Hsu's claims, and did not know whether or not he should tell him about the work Yen Tsui had planned in such secrecy. Dare he defy Hsu Peng-fei? In this impossible situation he could only sit there motionless, a cold sweat trickling down under his shirt.

Shen Yang-chai, who had remained silent so far, now spoke in his usual deliberate way:

"We received an order from the Generalissimo yesterday morning. He has set a time-limit of one week for smashing the leading organ of the Communist Underground. This is his third personal directive. Unfortunately, Director Yen is now on an inspection tour in Yunnan Province and has not yet returned, but Department Chief Hsu cannot wait to finish off the case, which is why he has asked you to come here to discuss the situation."

"Discuss the situation here?" Li Chi-kang put special em-

phasis on the word "here," implying that his work should have been discussed at Special District Headquarters and not at the Second Department. He knew that Yen Tsui and Shen Yang-chai did not get along with each other, because he had always been given his assignments when Shen Yang-chai was not around. So he felt that he dared to argue with this superior of his who had no actual power. However, Shen Yang-chai's words had made him sense difficulty of his position. Shen Yang-chai and Hsu Peng-fei were hand-in-glove and it was quite possible that Shen Yang-chai had used his position as vice-director to find out what he and Cheng Ke-chang were doing, and had then waited until Yen Tsui was away on tour to bring Hsu Peng-fei in on the matter.

"You obviously don't realize," said Shen Yang-chai placatingly, but with thinly-veiled pressure, "that Director Yen gave you your assignment before the Security Department came into existence. At that time the Southwest Special District Headquarters could act on its own. Now it's different. The Security Department has been set up and is headed by General Hsu Peng-fei. He has the authority to direct the activities of all troops, police, gendarmes and secret agents in Chungking. Both Director Yen and I are concurrently vice-directors of the Security Department. I suppose you realize that when Director Yen returns he will have to report in full to the Department Chief. As Director Yen is away, you had better make your report first. As I am here, you need not have any fear of being called to account when the Director returns."

Hsu Peng-fei affected indifference to their conversation. He reclined in his armchair, smiling and smoking a cigarette.

Li Chi-kang couldn't help shivering as he watched Hsu Peng-fei's humourless smile. Seeing no other way out, he reluctantly supplied the information Hsu Peng-fei wanted.

He said that his assignment at first had been to spy on the progressive student movement at Chungking University. He had thought that Hua Wei's actions seemed suspicious, so Yen Tsui had ordered him to find some way of getting into the

same dormitory as Hua Wei. Later he had stumbled on the relationship between Chen Sung-lin and Hua Wei. Then, after he had been wounded, the Special Adviser had told Yen Tsui that full use should be made of the incident and that he should play the part of a wounded hero in order to gain the confidence of the underground Party organization. Director Yen had also given him copies of *Forward* which he carried around for Hua Wei to notice.

"What an old fox that Yen Tsui is," thought Hsu Peng-fei. "As soon as the American FBI sent that special adviser to improve the work at SACO, Yen Tsui managed to get in with him. It wouldn't surprise me if the whole project was engineered by the American Advisory Department! Nevertheless, sly as he is, Yen Tsui can't pull any fast ones on me!"

Wei Chi-po who had been standing to one side caught Hsu Peng-fei's glance and hastened to replenish Li Chi-kang's tea cup. Strictly speaking, it was not an accident that Li Chi-kang had been beaten up. Though it happened by a mere coincidence that particular day, it was by no means the first example of friction and conflict between the secret and non-secret organizations. Wei Chi-po had been spying on Li Chi-kang, secretly reporting on his activities and even looking for an excuse to pick a quarrel with him. While each had been trying to put spokes in the other's wheels, he had failed to discover that Li Chi-kang had surreptitiously done a good deal of work.

"Later," Li Chi-kang continued, "the American Advisory Department decided that it was inconvenient for me to work alone, so Cheng Ke-chang was sent to assist me. The Special Adviser laid down the principles for our work. He said we should limit ourselves to studying our adversaries, leading them on, observing their speech and behaviour. We should play up to them and on no account ask questions. The Special Adviser told us that the Communist movement is entirely different from what it was before. Rash questions and statements would not only fail to gain us any information, but might even expose us. . . ."

"Go ahead!" Hsu Peng-fei commanded.

"The Director told Cheng Ke-chang to sell his overcoat and bedding. And sure enough, this action won him the confidence of the Communists. He moved into the Shaping bookstore. Later on he noticed a man. . . ."

"Who?" Hsu Peng-fei asked abruptly.

". . . a man called Fu Chih-kao who often came to the bookshop and turned out to be its manager. Every time he came, Chen Sung-lin gave Cheng Ke-chang a copy of *Forward* to read. Cheng Ke-chang deliberately mentioned that it was possible to mail *Forward* through his friends at the post office — this was the American Adviser's idea. You already know about this. . . ."

"Where does Fu Chih-kao live?"

"The Adviser wouldn't let Cheng Ke-chang inquire. Director Yen Tsui sent two other men to follow him home. Fu Chih-kao is the chief accountant at the Tachuan Bank."

"What other people does Chen Sung-lin have connections with?"

"None."

"Who is the guarantor for the bookshop?"

"We never investigated."

"That will be easy to find out. We'll get the Social Affairs Bureau to check up on the bookshop's business licence." Hsu Peng-fei pursued his questioning: "Your original assignment at Chungking University has not changed, has it?"

"I cover that and the bookshop at the same time. Just recently, however, Hua Wei suddenly left the university. His whereabouts are now unknown."

"Humph, that will do for now." Hsu Peng-fei changed the subject. "You have only touched the outer fringe of the Communist Underground, just a few individuals who distribute *Forward*. The really important clues are those I got by checking the mails. . . . Nevertheless, your report has given me some ideas. First we'll mop up the small fry and then smash the centre." Hsu Peng-fei turned to Shen Yang-chai to seek his

opinion. "Yang-chai, my idea is to start on the easiest part of the job and begin with the Shaping bookshop. What do you think?"

"Sir!" Li Chi-kang hurriedly interjected, "Director Yen's idea was to trail a long line in order to catch the big fish. He wants to get right into the Communist Underground. His plans are going very well. . . ." Before he finished his sentence, he noticed that Hsu Peng-fei was glaring at him and ended up lamely: "Director Yen is returning in a day or two. Perhaps we should wait for him."

"What?" barked Hsu Peng-fei. "Wait for Director Yen to return? And what if I don't wait? I had already decided to give orders to polish off the Chikiang case. It was Vice-Director Shen who persuaded me to inform you, so as to avoid creating difficulties in your work. In any case, the secret and non-secret organizations are one big family. I'm not quite as narrow-minded and selfish as Director Yen! Frankly, I'm only doing this as a favour to Vice-Director Shen. In fact I could have made all my arrests without your knowledge. Where would you look for your big fish, then?"

"The Department Chief is being kind," said Shen Yang-chai. "Director Yen's idea of trailing a long line to catch the big fish is a good one, but time does not permit us to do so. Nanking is pressing us very hard, as you know."

Hsu Peng-fei said severely: "Hua Wei's sudden departure proves that something has definitely gone wrong with your work. What big fish do you think you'll catch? If we don't act now, we probably won't even hook a shrimp, and then there will be trouble when inquiries are made."

"Sir," Li Chi-kang pleaded in a low voice, "Cheng Ke-chang is an undercover man who hasn't been exposed yet. Could we possibly keep this secret when we pounce?"

Hsu Peng-fei grunted. After a moment's reflection he said in a considerate and ingratiating tone: "Very well. We'll arrest Cheng Ke-chang along with the others and get him to continue

to deceive Fu Chih-kao and Chen Sung-lin in prison. He can put on another 'wounded hero' act."

Li Chi-kang sat there saying nothing and looking very ill at ease.

"Is your rank still major? How big a reward did Director Yen give you, eh?" Without waiting for an answer, Hsu Peng-fei declared magnanimously: "I tell you what: in the name of the Security Department I'll give you and Cheng Ke-chang a bonus of fifty million dollars on account. I'll recommend you for an additional sum when the case is settled."

At a sign from Hsu Peng-fei, Wei Chi-po hurried forward for instructions.

"Take Li Chi-kang to the General Affairs Section to collect his reward, and see that he gets a good meal tonight!"

As Li Chi-kang was leaving, Hsu Peng-fei added significantly:

"Chi-kang, when you go back, make the necessary preparations with Cheng Ke-chang. We are acting immediately, and will break the whole case open tonight!"

Hsu Peng-fei was highly satisfied with the outcome of this battle of wits. Although he had never, in fact, found any clue in Chikiang, he had now managed to pick up this invaluable lead, the Shaping bookshop.

"Peng-fei, your shrewdness is astonishing. So Yen Tsui's plans were worked out by the American Adviser after all!" Shen Yang-chai flicked the ashes from his cigarette and stuck his ivory holder between his teeth with a grin. "If that crafty Special Adviser learns about the methods you employed today, even he will be knocked out with admiration!"

Hsu Peng-fei guffawed. He was reminded of a saying which in his opinion should be included among the classics:

> A small mind makes not a gentleman,
> A real man lacks not in venom.

7

THE fine spring rain continued. It was just after eight, and there were no customers left in the bookshop. Chen Sung-lin had closed the door, and was putting the books straight in the shelves.

A little later the door opened quietly and a middle-aged man wearing a damp blue cotton gown came in with a brown leather briefcase under his arm. With the noise of the pattering rain beating on the pavement Chen Sung-lin did not hear him arrive.

The man was tall with a broad forehead. He wiped the raindrops from his face and looked about the shop.

"Chen Sung-lin!" He put his rain-soaked hand on Chen Sung-lin's shoulder. "How are things?"

"Oh! Lao Hsu!" Chen Sung-lin turned around and grasped the other's hand, as if meeting a long-lost friend. This was the first time he had met Hsu Yun-feng since leaving the factory.

Hsu Yun-feng shut the door and gazed at Chen Sung-lin benevolently.

"How are things with you? Have you got used to being a shop assistant?"

"I have," Chen Sung-lin replied cheerfully. He had been in very good spirits lately and had been working very hard, and Lao Hsu's arrival made him even happier. He asked how things were at the factory.

"I knew you'd ask that," said Lao Hsu, but did not reply to his question right away. "It's raining quite hard tonight, so I won't go back. We haven't seen each other for some time, so let's have a good long talk," he said. Then he examined the shop as if to impress every detail on his memory. "I've another purpose in coming here too. I want to use this as a liaison post."

A delighted grin lit up Chen Sung-lin's chubby face. So this reserve liaison post was being put to use at last! This decision meant that he would be able to meet Hsu Yun-feng more often from now on and that the Party had made new advances in its work.

Hsu Yun-feng noticed a row of brand-new bookcases, as yet empty of books, and asked in surprise:

"Chen Sung-lin, is the bookshop being enlarged?"

"Of course!" Chen Sung-lin nodded. He explained with pleasure: "All this new equipment was made to order and there's more coming. We've already made arrangements to rent the shop next door."

"Oh!" answered Lao Hsu noncommittally.

"Didn't you know that we were expanding?" asked Chen Sung-lin in astonishment.

Hsu Yun-feng made no reply as he continued to look around the shop. He went up to a bookcase and scanned the titles of the books in it.

Chen Sung-lin noticed with concern that Lao Hsu's clothes were damp. "You're soaked! Why don't you come to my room and put on something dry?"

"Do you live upstairs?"

Chen Sung-lin nodded.

"Never mind the clearing up. Let's go up and talk."

Chen Sung-lin switched on the light at the foot of the stairs, and they were about to go up when Lao Hsu asked: "What's all this stacked over here?"

"Paper," Chen Sung-lin replied. "For our new magazine."

"Magazine?"

"Yes, a literary magazine. You know about it, don't you?"

"Who said I did?"

"Fu Chih-kao told me that the leadership gave the scheme its full backing. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin was about to say more, when he saw that Hsu Yun-feng was not listening, but going straight up to the bedroom.

Chen Sung-lin hurried to get a stool, but the other had already seated himself on the edge of the bed. Chen Sung-lin noticed that Hsu Yun-feng, no longer as cheerful as he had been at first, was looking over the little room. Chen Sung-lin poured him a glass of hot water from a thermos, then opened a suitcase and took out some dry clothes.

"Never mind," said Hsu Yun-feng, pushing aside the garments proffered by Chen Sung-lin. "How many people are living here?" he asked. "Why are there two sets of washing things?"

"We have a new assistant," explained Chen Sung-lin. "His cousin just came for him."

"A new assistant?" Hsu Yun-feng's voice was filled with suspicion and displeasure. After a long pause, he asked more calmly: "Who is this new assistant?"

"Cheng Ke-chang, a young man who is out of work."

"A young man out of work?" Lao Hsu echoed, then said no more. This was a liaison post, and no outsiders should have been allowed to get in on it! Hadn't Fu Chih-kao said that everything at the bookshop had been done according to the set plan? Why was it that when he came here he found that nothing was as it should be? Why was the bookshop being enlarged? Why did it conspicuously display so many progressive books? What was this about starting a magazine? And the new assistant? This was all wrong, and Fu Chih-kao had reported none of it. If he hadn't come to look around himself things would certainly have gone wrong the moment it was used as a liaison post. Hsu Yun-feng was not only very angry at Fu Chih-kao's behaviour; he was also acutely aware of how dangerous the situation was. Years of experience had taught him to be on his guard whenever the least irregularity occurred.

"Chen Sung-lin, who introduced this new assistant? Tell me all the details."

Seeing Hsu Yun-feng's grave expression, Chen Sung-lin became worried. It was now clear that Hsu Yun-feng knew nothing of what he had done under Fu Chih-kao's directions.

He told Hsu Yun-feng all he knew from beginning to end. Hsu Yun-feng listened in silence without interrupting.

Cheng Ke-chang . . . the post office . . . the reading circle . . . Hsu Yun-feng thought over this for a while and then asked: "Did he say who was in charge of the reading circle?"

"He told me it was someone by the name of Chiu who has now left the post office."

"Who is in charge now?"

"Li Ke-ming and someone called Chang Yung. . . ."

These names were new to Hsu Yun-feng. After a moment's reflection, he decided he'd find out immediately if these people were members of the reading circle, and also find out about this person who called himself Cheng Ke-chang. Bringing in a stranger whose past was unknown was even more dangerous than such matters as buying equipment and expanding the bookshop.

Seeing how worried Hsu Yun-feng was, Chen Sung-lin hastened to tell him about Cheng Ke-chang's general behaviour and his own impressions of him.

Hsu Yun-feng sat there saying nothing, and by the time Chen Sung-lin had finished he was frowning heavily and looking very serious.

"You say he likes to write verses? Let me see some of them!"

Chen Sung-lin took a little notebook from under Cheng Ke-chang's pillow. Hsu Yun-feng leafed through it, carefully reading page after page. Suddenly he lit on some humorous lines. His hand paused. Where had he seen this before? He thought a moment, then asked: "Did *he* write these verses?"

"Yes. I remember that evening very clearly," Chen Sung-lin affirmed. "He was lying on his bed. After each line or so he'd get up and mutter to himself. When he'd finished it, he put his arm around my shoulders and told me that this was his best effort at political satire."

"Was it ever published?"

"No," Chen Sung-lin explained. "He said his poems were all written for practice, and he had never tried to get them

published. Fu Chih-kao said that when the literary magazine started, we could choose a few."

"These lines were plagiarized," Hsu Yun-feng stated flatly, raising his eyebrows. "They were published in a supplement to *Hsinhua Daily* long ago."

"What? Plagiarized?" Chen Sung-lin was staggered. "How could he be so cheap!"

"This is not the only one. I think I've seen many of these lines before. But why should he go to the trouble of copying other people's work, particularly as the poems are not intended for publication?" Looking intently at Chen Sung-lin, he went on slowly: "Think! What do you suppose his purpose was in doing this? I believe that this is his way of tricking us into trusting him."

Hsu Yun-feng's words went home like a dagger, and Chen Sung-lin's thoughts started to whirl madly.

"The bookshop is a secret Party organ," continued Hsu Yun-feng. "Cheng Ke-chang must have ulterior motives in coming to live here."

"What? Is he an agent?"

"It's very likely . . ." said Hsu Yun-feng, feeling certain that the bookshop had already been spotted by the enemy and that it was absolutely necessary to withdraw at once.

"Damn it! Why didn't I spot him?" Chen Sung-lin sat down heavily on the edge of the bed, but was too agitated to stay put. Springing up, he said:

"But Fu Chih-kao is an old comrade! He always told me to boldly open up new fields of endeavour and get in contact with the masses. Why did he . . . ?"

"You lack experience, but Fu Chih-kao . . ." Hsu Yun-feng did not go on. Instead he said: "If Cheng Ke-chang and his 'cousin' are really secret agents, how would you deal with them?"

"I'd fight it out with them!" grated Chen Sung-lin between his teeth. "Others may be scared of secret agents, but I'm not!"

"What we need are cool heads," Hsu Yun-feng said slowly.

"We mustn't be afraid, but neither should we fight it out recklessly. Think carefully! Have they done anything they don't usually do recently? We must know both ourselves and our adversaries when struggling with the enemy!"

Chen Sung-lin thought a moment, and what now seemed a most suspicious incident came to mind. "That Li Chi-kang has never come to the bookshop before; but just now he came here in the rain and went out with Cheng Ke-chang. Cheng Ke-chang came back a few minutes later, looking very nervous. He told me not to go out this evening as Li Chi-kang was coming at about ten o'clock to talk something over with me. . . . He smiled at me, but even at the time his smile looked unpleasantly false."

Hsu Yun-feng frowned again.

"Lao Hsu, there's something fishy here! Do you think something will happen tonight?"

"You say Li Chi-kang has never been here before?"

"Never!" replied Chen Sung-lin.

"He's coming at about ten o'clock to see you?"

"That's what Cheng Ke-chang said."

Hsu Yun-feng thought hard. He felt that the incident mentioned by Chen Sung-lin was most suspicious and meant that trouble was imminent. Fu Chih-kao had actually allowed this dangerous character to remain in close proximity to a secret Party organ for a long period of time — an unforgivable blunder! This liaison post was useless now, and must be abandoned immediately. Delay would be fatal. He considered Li Chi-kang's recent appearance a most ominous sign, so he advised Chen Sung-lin to leave before ten o'clock and stay at the Tsechikou Steel Plant for a few days. He also said: "Being careful is not cowardice! You must shake off Cheng Ke-chang and Li Chi-kang and get out of this dangerous neighbourhood."

"What about the bookshop?"

"It's useless now. Even if nothing happens, a place like this cannot be used as a liaison post!"

"Lao Hsu," said Chen Sung-lin, "you'd better go first!" It

was getting late, and worried that something might happen to Hsu Yun-feng, he hurriedly handed him his briefcase.

Hsu Yun-feng took it, but didn't leave right away. His composure steadied Chen Sung-lin. "Will it be all right if I do a few things first?" he asked, telling Hsu Yun-feng what he had in mind.

Hsu Yun-feng nodded, put his briefcase under his arm and slowly went downstairs, saying: "Don't be too long about it!"

The ceiling-light shone upon two men deep in conversation. Rain pattered on the windows, drowning the sound of their voices.

". . . that's all I have to add," Fu Chih-kao said to Hsu Yun-feng who was listening attentively.

"There's nothing else?" Hsu Yun-feng presently asked. "Then what's your opinion on the matter?"

Hsu Yun-feng did not look as if he were in a hurry to draw any conclusions. He was still waiting for further information.

"There's nothing else," said Fu Chih-kao with a sigh of relief. He looked at his watch. "The District Committee is calling a meeting. All the comrades must be there by now."

"No need to go."

"Why?"

"I've just told them that the meeting is postponed."

Hsu Yun-feng's decision greatly surprised Fu Chih-kao. Had it really been necessary? He himself didn't think that matters were so serious. Hsu Yun-feng must be having the jitters. That was something that often happened to veteran underground workers. However, he wasn't going to argue with his superior, so he merely said:

"Then, may I go now to look over the bookshop?"

"You are never to go there again!"

"What?"

"Chen Sung-lin has already left."

"What?" Fu Chih-kao clasped and unclasped his hands in

irritation. Sitting down again, he said with faint, but unmistakable defiance:

"It's one thing to criticize the shortcomings of the bookshop, but to shut it down merely because. . . ."

"Do you know what kind of a shortcoming this is?" asked Hsu Yun-feng who felt that Fu Chih-kao was seeing the matter in the wrong light and that his attitude was unhealthy. However, he remained calm and merely asked: "Have you examined your own work lately?"

Fu Chih-kao looked worried and avoided Hsu Yun-feng's eyes.

Hsu Yun-feng continued: "The bookshop was to be used as a liaison post. The principles regarding its operation were clearly set out months ago, but you have completely disregarded them. A liaison post is a highly secret place, yet you let a person of unknown background get in. The bookshop was to be small and of no particular political colour, but you insisted on enlarging it, and selling progressive books, and even conceived the brilliant idea of starting a literary magazine. Chungking University does not come within the scope of your work, but you sent Chen Sung-lin there to carry on activities. . . . Don't you know that these are violations of the principles of underground work? Shouldn't such a liaison post be shut down immediately?"

Hsu Yun-feng stared at Fu Chih-kao's lowered head and continued: "What is it that has blinded you to all this? Why haven't you done what the Party wanted you to? Why have you insisted on doing these things behind the Party's back? During these past months you have repeatedly expressed the desire to take on more work. It makes you look very keen, but what is your real motive?"

Fu Chih-kao admitted having violated principles, nevertheless he thought that he too had a number of years of experience in underground work to his credit. Li Chi-kang and Cheng Ke-chang were not necessarily as bad as Hsu Yun-feng had painted them, and anyway, what had a few plagiarized verses to do with the activities of secret agents?

Hsu Yun-feng seemed to read his thoughts, and quietly and patiently asked him: "Have you carefully investigated Cheng Ke-chang's past?"

"Not yet, but I was going to do so very soon. However, Chen Sung-lin understands him, and the copies of *Forward* which he sent out through the post office all reached their destination."

"Chen Sung-lin worked under your erroneous leadership. Are you trying to shift the blame on to him? And why did you tell Cheng Ke-chang to mail *Forward*? Was it to test him or to make use of him? Eh? Why didn't you go directly through Party channels to find out whether he came from the post office or not? Besides, you know that *Forward* must not be sent through the mail. Why did you deliberately break this rule?"

Fu Chih-kao bowed his head and said nothing. Hsu Yun-feng told him that the post office did have a reading circle once, but because it was too openly progressive, it had attracted the attention of secret agents, and had ceased its activities long ago. Furthermore, the members of the reading circle had never posted any copies of *Forward*. Through whom then had Cheng Ke-chang posted *Forward*?

Fu Chih-kao had no answer.

"It is highly probable that he is a secret agent," went on Hsu Yun-feng. "You have been taken in by his guile and haven't yet come to your senses. But I tell you that the enemy confronting us are the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries, and they are armed to the teeth. Any tendency to slacken our vigilance and treat them lightly can only result in irreparable damage to the Party. In my opinion, everyone concerned with the Shaping bookshop must be moved away."

Fu Chih-kao still unconvinced said hesitantly: "It looks as though I've made a mistake without realizing it."

"We won't discuss your mistakes now!" Hsu Yun-feng said sharply. "Who do you think should be shifted first of all?"

"Need anyone be moved?" asked Fu Chih-kao in a tone that disclaimed any responsibility for such a decision having to be made.

"Everyone concerned must move at once!"

Fu Chih-kao thought for a moment. "If that's the case, the first should be Chen Sung-lin. And then . . . er. . . . When I applied for the bookshop's business licence, I gave Liu Sze-yang as guarantor because of his excellent social connections."

"Why did you use his name? Didn't I tell you to find a guarantor among your other social contacts? Has Yu Hsin-chiang ever been to the bookshop?"

"No."

"Anyone else? Have any members of the District Committee ever been there?"

"No. Li Chi-kang is still at Chungking University."

"The Party will look after that. Now think again. Everyone concerned must be told to move as soon as possible. Liu Sze-yang should never have been involved in this matter."

"I'll think it over after I get home."

"What? You're thinking of going home? Do you actually believe that you haven't given yourself away?"

Fu Chih-kao's eyes popped in horror. "Have I exposed myself too?"

"The enemy have undoubtedly had their eyes on you for a long time. You must be one of the first to move! And just to be on the safe side, our present meeting place must also be abandoned."

"If I have to leave," Fu Chih-kao didn't hide his dissatisfaction, "I'd like to go to the countryside. . . ."

"That will be decided later. But you must not go home tonight!"

Fu Chih-kao nodded resignedly.

Hsu Yun-feng could see that he was not at all happy with this and knew that many conflicting thoughts were working in his mind. However, this was not the time for criticism. The matter of first importance at this critical moment was to save the Party organization. He reminded Fu Chih-kao that it was past ten o'clock already. Curfew started at twelve, so they had better stop talking and do something. Hsu Yun-feng was not

personally acquainted with Liu Sze-yang, so he told Fu Chih-kao to find a safe place from which to phone Liu and tell him to leave. Both of them were to put up at friends' houses. Hsu Yun-feng thought a moment and then continued: "Today is Saturday. Go to the New Life Bazaar tomorrow morning. I'll meet you at the entrance at ten o'clock sharp. There are many more questions which we must discuss."

"I'll be there punctually." Fu Chih-kao shook hands with Hsu Yun-feng. "Comrade Hsu, I'm thankful to you for the way you've helped me. I'm willing to examine thoroughly the errors in my thinking. I hope the Party and the comrades will help me. . . ."

"The Party has confidence in a comrade who conscientiously corrects his mistakes," said Hsu Yun-feng earnestly, before adding some pointed advice. "A genuine proletarian fighter must have the courage to battle with the non-proletarian elements in his thinking. He should not evade such a struggle. If the dust is not swept away, it becomes thicker. Those who only make a half-hearted pretence at reforming themselves will end up on the rubbish heap of history. There have been many such object lessons. I hope you will display more political consciousness in the future."

Hsu Yun-feng glanced at his watch. "It's already a quarter past ten. Call up Liu Sze-yang at once, and make sure you speak to him in person."

"Very well then. I'll be off."

"This is yours." Hsu Yun-feng handed the flustered Fu Chih-kao the umbrella he had forgotten and opened his own. "Be careful on the way!"

"Don't worry, Lao Hsu. I've got my wits about me when it comes to dealing with the enemy."

The rain was heavier and pattered monotonously on the deserted street. Hsu Yun-feng stood at the crossroad, watching Fu Chih-kao walk away. He watched him uneasily until he disappeared from sight. After making certain that no one was following either of them he set off in the opposite direction

through the muddy streets. He was very worried because although Fu Chih-kao was obeying instructions, Hsu Yun-feng could see that he was not at all convinced of the danger of the situation.

"Chen Sung-lin! Chen Sung-lin!" Cheng Ke-chang stood in the drizzle, tapping softly at the shop-door. "I'm back. Open up!"

The minutes passed, but there was still no sign of life inside. Cheng Ke-chang peered through the cracks between the boards. It was pitch dark. He pushed the door lightly and it opened. It had not been locked. He stepped in and turned on the light. Climbing the stairs he called out:

"Chen Sung-lin, I've got good news. My cousin has got me a job as a primary school teacher! The school is quite near, only about ten minutes' walk away. Do you think I should take it or stay at the bookshop? . . ."

Cheng Ke-chang reached the top of the stairs, still babbling away.

"You went to sleep without even locking the door." He turned on the upstairs' light. A few seconds later, he reappeared at the head of the staircase, panic written all over him. He tripped, and fell downstairs with a shriek. Scrambling to his feet he dragged himself to the door, shouting: "Quick! Quick!"

The shouts brought several men in raincoats running out of the shadows. Their leader looked round the bookshop gun in hand, and asked with forced calm:

"What's up?"

"Chen Sung-lin has fled!"

"What?"

"I only left him at eight o'clock this evening."

"It's half past ten now, so it was only two and a half hours ago!"

"Yes, two and a half hours," Cheng Ke-chang repeated in desperation. "Wei Chi-po, what are we to do now?"

Wei Chi-po scanned the orderly bookshelves. Everything was

as usual and he could see nothing to arouse suspicion. But he still felt very disturbed.

"Search his room!" he ordered, pushing Cheng Ke-chang up the stairs.

"Look, what's that?" shouted Wei Chi-po as he saw a sheet of paper on the bed. "Is this his writing?"

"Yes, it is," affirmed Cheng Ke-chang when he saw it.

Relief flooded Cheng Ke-chang's ashen face.

"He — he hasn't gone! Look, he — he left this for me. I'll read it to you: 'Dear Cheng Ke-chang: The manager has asked me to go to town to discuss the decoration of the shop front. I'll be back by twelve. If by any chance I'm held up, I shall be back tomorrow for breakfast.' Yes, he wrote this, he can't have run away! He's coming back!"

Cheng Ke-chang tossed the sheet of paper on the table, then pulled a drawer open and groped around until he found a bag of shelled peanuts.

"Have a chair. We'll wait for him," said Cheng Ke-chang, smiling as he grabbed a handful of peanuts and dropped them into his mouth. "You also had a scare, didn't you!" he said as he munched. "Come, let's have some wine, too bad there's so little of it. . . ."

Wei Chi-po pulled out a perfumed handkerchief, wiped the cold sweat from his brow, and then took off his raincoat. "I was afraid the chief's wonderful show would flop even before the curtain went up!"

He picked up the winecup, but before it reached his lips, he set it down again. "Still, we mustn't be careless." He turned to his subordinates and ordered them to stay outside within earshot of the bookshop, and to keep a close watch. They were to wait for his signal before taking any action.

"You and I," he said, turning to Cheng Ke-chang, "will stay here and have a few drinks. Let's get some wine!"

"Turn off the light downstairs!" Cheng Ke-chang reminded the departing agents. "And close the door behind you!"

"Tasty, these peanuts!" Wei Chi-po remarked, and then continued with a smug grin: "When he comes back we'll put on another show. You stand by the door with your hands in the air and shake like a leaf, and I'll. . . ." He took a gulp of wine and as he did so, his eyes suddenly widened. There was something under the bed.

"What's that?" Wei Chi-po pulled away the bedspread and kicked under the bed. Some ashes flew up.

"What's that? What's he been burning?"

"Yes, what are the ashes of?"

"They must have been secret papers!" Wei Chi-po shouted in consternation.

As if shaken out of a dream, Cheng Ke-chang rushed over to Chen Sung-lin's trunk. He wrenched off the padlock and raised the lid. There was nothing in it but a wash-basin half-filled with ashes.

"What the blazes!" bellowed Cheng Ke-chang.

"Damn it! We've been fooled!" Wei Chi-po stamped with rage and then flung himself on the bed. "That note was merely a trick to gain time! Chen Sung-lin decamped hours ago!"

Fu Chih-kao was feeling very down-hearted, as he aimlessly roamed the muddy streets. It was not raining at the moment, but big drops were still dripping from the eaves of the houses. Fu Chih-kao was preoccupied with his thoughts, and his feet moved mechanically. He still held his umbrella over his head, as if to ward off the worry and suffering which beset him. He looked back occasionally to see if he was being followed, but the streets were silent and no one was tailing him.

Hsu Yun-feng's conclusion had struck like a bolt from the blue. If, as Hsu Yun-feng maintained, Li Chi-kang and Cheng Ke-chang were both secret agents, then the situation was extremely dangerous. The bookshop, Chen Sung-lin, and himself were exposed, and immediate steps would have to be taken to withdraw and transfer the people concerned in order to put the enemy off the scent. And yet . . . the bookshop had been open and he had known Li Chi-kang and Cheng Ke-chang for quite

a long time. If they were not what they pretended to be, then why had nothing happened before? Fu Chih-kao doubted whether they were really agents. Take Cheng Ke-chang for example, a thin young man, quite unsophisticated; maybe he was rather melancholy, but that didn't make him any different from other young unemployed intellectuals. With all his years of experience couldn't he size up a youngster like that?

Fu Chih-kao heaved a deep sigh and stopped at a brightly lit street corner, undecided where to go. He was sure that he knew the two inside out as he had been in close contact with them. Hsu Yun-feng had made only one hurried visit to the bookshop and had never even seen the man in question. With nothing but the trifling matter of a few plagiarized verses to go on, he was making a mountain out of a molehill! He had come to a wrong conclusion. It was based entirely on abstract principles and concepts and lacked any justification whatsoever. He must be suffering from nervous tension, like so many other veteran underground workers. Yes, that was it! He had thought so when he was talking with Hsu Yun-feng, but had not mentioned it at the time. But now this conviction was stronger and he believed that this accounted for Hsu Yun-feng's attitude.

Hardly knowing where he was going, he found himself near the Kuotai Cinema. Bright lights illuminated a huge, garishly-coloured poster depicting a nude woman. The last show had just ended and the audience was pouring out into the street. Fu Chih-kao was caught up in this stream of humanity and jerked out of his solitary reflections. Many of the people were pushing their way into a café from which music was blaring, and without thinking he followed them inside.

Fu Chih-kao asked for a cup of coffee, feeling that he needed something to clear his aching head. The warmth and comfort of the café and the cheerful neon lights across the street soothed his overwrought nerves. His doubts about Hsu Yun-feng's decision were growing. If the danger were as real as Hsu Yun-feng made it out, why had the enemy not acted before? If those two

were really on the other side, something would surely have happened long ago!

The café was a large establishment. Strains of music came floating through the velvet curtains which separated the tea-room from a dance-floor. Fu Chih-kao looked at the people around him — they were mostly couples and not interested in him as he huddled in a corner. Fu Chih-kao set down his cup. He found the coffee too weak, and not stimulating enough, so he called for some brandy and a cold side-dish and settled down to drink. He would take this opportunity to think things over carefully.

Although he had not known Hsu Yun-feng very long, he had rather an unpleasant impression of him, for he was very strict and had the usual worker's habit of being too much concerned about details. Hsu Yun-feng was also rather self-opinionated, and his frequent criticism led Fu Chih-kao to think that he was prejudiced against him. What kind of people did he like? Judging from Hsu Yun-feng's messengers Cheng Kang and Yu Hsin-chiang, through whom he had carried on his dealings with him, they were all young people, without vision or ambition, who thought of nothing but their work. Maybe Hsu Yun-feng thought that such people were more easily controlled than highly experienced men like himself! Fu Chih-kao had been harbouring such views for some time, but had kept them to himself. He was quite sure that Sister Chiang had a poor opinion of him as well. His feelings for them were rather cool, too.

That was why he could not blindly submit to their leadership. He believed that he must give some thought to his own personal ambitions and make some provision for the future, while working for the Party. He had his own ideas about the bookshop, and had intended to make it a success, run a magazine and gradually make it a centre around which he could establish a following among the masses. When liberation came it would certainly pay off better than simply having done some work in banking circles or running a mere liaison post! The talents nature had endowed him with should not remain idle. He had

to use every means within reach to further himself, if he was going to make a name for himself in the revolution and not sink into oblivion. There was nothing improper about that, if done within reasonable limits. Before the bookshop had been set up, he had planned to work in the students' movement. Later he had hoped to go to the countryside, for he had heard that things were going well in northern Szechuan, his birthplace. With nation-wide victory in sight, it would only be a matter of sticking it out for a year or two if he joined the armed struggle there. By that time he might even have fixed himself up as a guerilla commander of a unit!

Fu Chih-kao had felt the urge to make good use of his time and work with more "force" since learning that the revolution had taken a decisive turn towards victory. This had encouraged him to cast aside his usual caution and go in for bolder action. But now the promising bookshop project had been abandoned by Hsu Yun-feng and the literary magazine was done for. He couldn't help feeling upset about Li Chi-kang. What an ideal editor he would have made! He had also hoped to get Cheng Ke-chang into the underground New Democratic Youth Association. Then he would at last have had an organization at his disposal — things could have gone very smoothly. But tonight all these plans had been rudely shattered by Hsu Yun-feng! Why? Was it really because they were enemy spies? He doubted it. The more he thought of it, the more sure he was that Hsu Yun-feng was prejudiced against him. It was quite possible that he was jealous and didn't like to see others do well in projects he had no hand in. Jealousy was a universal human failing. Yes, he had probably done it out of spite. What he had said about agents working their way into the liaison post was just an excuse. Hsu Yun-feng's real motive was to disrupt and sabotage his potential achievements! He saw through Hsu Yun-feng! Fu Chih-kao found himself getting more and more indignant. His face already flushed, he tossed off the rest of the brandy and ordered another. He must think over the possibility of bringing his case before the higher leadership.

After another two glasses of brandy, however, his anger gave way to misgivings and even apprehension. Taking everything into consideration, it might be better not to send in a complaint. Hsu Yun-feng had been very successful in leading the workers' movement during recent months. Would the higher leadership believe him if he raised objections just now? Would they support him? He was not at all sure, being convinced that people always judged a man by his successes and failures.

Fu Chih-kao had always adopted an obedient, submissive attitude towards the Party. He hadn't been able however to refrain from saying a few words of opposition during arguments and raising objections occasionally, but he had always been careful to conceal from the Party what was actually going on at the back of his mind. So would it be to his advantage to make a rash complaint and leave an unfavourable impression with the Party just on the eve of victory?

He took another big gulp of brandy. . . . Perhaps it would be best to give in to Hsu Yun-feng. But what would be the upshot? It was hard to tell. Maybe criticism, or even punishment — a very depressing thought. He was most disturbed however at the prospect of being transferred from the bank. He'd been lucky enough to have a warm cosy home all these years. Once he left the bank, he would lose all the comforts of a life which had been the cover for his real status, and it wasn't likely that he'd get them back, at least not in the near future! These thoughts reminded Fu Chih-kao of his wife; maybe she was sitting up in bed right now, waiting for him to come home.

Thoroughly disturbed, he pushed aside the empty glass. Suddenly he remembered that Lao Hsu had told him to telephone Liu Sze-yang. There was a telephone on the counter; no one was using it at the moment. He only had to walk a couple of yards, dial a number, and get Liu Sze-yang to come out of his luxurious residence under some pretext. Liu Sze-yang had been his schoolmate in college, and although he'd been several classes below him, he was pleased to have Liu Sze-yang as one of his

friends, as he came from an old and distinguished family. . . . He stared moodily at the phone, wondering whether to phone him or not. If Liu Sze-yang agreed to meet him here, then he might as well give up all hopes of going home and seeing his wife again. Moreover, Hsu Yun-feng might suddenly decide to transfer him away from Chungking — and this was highly possible. In that case he would not even be able to say goodbye to her. Really, he couldn't be so callous as to leave her without a word and without making any arrangements for her future!

He got up and walked out of the café. The evening breeze cleared his head a little. Further down the street, a red paper-lantern shed its glow over the "Old Szechuan," a stall famed for beef prepared in the local style. His wife was particularly fond of hot, spicy beef. He would take her some tonight — their last night together. He bought a big package of beef and tripe and then headed home. He had now completely brushed aside Hsu Yun-feng's repeated instructions, and had decided that if Lao Hsu questioned him the following day, he would say that he did not go home, and that he hadn't been able to contact Liu Sze-yang. He was confident that he could get out of any difficulties in this way.

Fu Chih-kao walked through the silent streets, and soon reached the bank flats. He slowed down, looked around him, there was no one in sight. With a sigh of relief he hurried towards the familiar front door. The light was still on upstairs — everything seemed quite as usual, she was still waiting for him!

Putting the meat under his arm, he lowered his umbrella and reached out to ring the bell. At that very moment, several dark shadows loomed up behind him. He suddenly realized what was happening, but it was too late. A gun-barrel was jabbed into his back.

"Don't move!"

A cold shiver ran down his spine and his heart almost stopped beating. He wanted to shout, to warn his wife of the danger, but a gag was quickly thrust into his mouth and handcuffs

clicked on his wrists. The umbrella and beef fell into the gutter as the secret agents dragged him away. He heard a harsh voice saying:

"Get his wife too!"

Shaking uncontrollably, he managed to mumble desperately out of the corner of his mouth: "She . . . is . . . not. . . ."

"What?"

The gag was eased a little. Fu Chih-kao didn't dare shout, but he pleaded in low tones: "She . . . is not . . . a Communist. . . ."

The filthy gag was pulled even tighter than before. Several dark figures rushed past him towards the bright doorway and pressed the bell.

Everything went dark before his eyes. The world seemed to be coming to an end, and he felt the ground heaving beneath his feet. . . .

Through the black, rainy night, deep-toned chimes slowly struck twelve. It was midnight in Chungking — the city of darkness.

8

THE teahouse was noisy and crowded. Customers dressed in Western suits, in military uniforms, or in long gowns and silken jackets came and went in an endless stream. There was never an empty table in this high-class establishment, and on Sundays it was always filled to overflowing. Among its clientele were celebrities, social lights, and fashionably dressed men and women, all connoisseurs of good tea. It was also frequented by brokers and rich businessmen, politicians and bankers who regularly came here to find out about the state of the market and arrange deals. Some came to while their time away in this bustling atmosphere, while others met to gossip and discuss politics. The babel of voices, the laughter, and heated arguments; the clinking of cups and saucers, and the calls of harassed waiters; the cries of vendors hawking cigarettes, melon seeds, and magazines; and the occasional curses to drive off beggars — all this merged into a medley of sound, in ironical contrast to the sign on the wall: "Political discussion prohibited."

Two men sat face to face at a delicately-wrought tea-table. One of them was Li Ching-yuan, wearing dark-rimmed glasses and a brown Western suit. His companion, in a long blue gown, was Hsu Yun-feng. There was nothing unusual about them to mark them out from the teahouse crowd. It was in places like these that underground workers could best meet and discuss their work.

After leaving Fu Chih-kao, Hsu Yun-feng had spent the night at the home of the Shatse district secretary. He had exchanged views with him and made plans for moving the personnel concerned. The district secretary had hurried off to Shapingpa early that morning. Hsu Yun-feng had come to this teahouse in

the New Life Bazaar to keep an appointment with Li Ching-yuan, the vice-secretary of the municipal Party committee. He reported the news about the Shaping bookshop to Li Ching-yuan and also told him about his conversation with Fu Chih-kao. Li Ching-yuan was shocked and agreed that the situation was serious. They had now been talking long enough for most of the spiced melon seeds on the table to be eaten, and tapping his cup lightly, Hsu Yun-feng casually called the waiter to fill up the teapot.

As the waiter approached their table, Li Ching-yuan lowered the *Commercial Daily* he was holding and said: "In my opinion, the exchange rate for gold and U.S. dollar will go on rising. The money situation is bound to be tight."

This remark was quite in harmony with the heated discussion on market conditions which was going on at the next table. After the waiter had filled their teapot and left, Li Ching-yuan pushed up his glasses with a habitual gesture and whispered to Lao Hsu: "I went to the District Committee this morning. They are moving. So it was you who gave the alarm last night. It was a very timely one."

Hsu Yun-feng nodded, and asked in low tones: "Has the District Committee discovered anything new?"

"Chen Sung-lin is probably out of danger," replied Li Ching-yuan. "Late last night several suspicious characters were seen loitering near the bookshop. . . ." His face was expressionless except for his eyes looking grim behind his glasses. "From what you've just told me, it looks as if the enemy did in fact go into action last night. That was a close shave!"

"What about Liu Sze-yang?"

"I don't know," replied Li Ching-yuan. "I'll try to get in touch with him later."

A vendor hawking magazines approached them, waving a pictorial. Li Ching-yuan felt for his lighter and slowly lit a cigarette.

"*Life*! Just arrived! *Film Star*! *Shanghai Weekly Review*! Just off the press today! . . ."

Listening to Li Ching-yuan, Hsu Yun-feng had become increasingly aware of the gravity of the situation. That he had been right about the enemy's plans and had acted in time to forestall the danger did not give him much satisfaction. He felt bad, because it had been a blunder to let Fu Chih-kao take charge of the reserve liaison post. He had noticed many things wrong with Fu Chih-kao, but it was now apparent that he had not given him enough attention. Even though Fu had seemed more reliable before, he should not have trusted him. Hsu Yun-feng glanced at Li Ching-yuan, who was exhaling smoke with his usual calm. Somehow he felt that Li Ching-yuan would never lose his nerve, no matter how severe a strain he was under.

Their conversation was frequently interrupted by people coming and going, but, far from disturbing them, this gave them a feeling of security. Li Ching-yuan cracked the melon seeds and waited for the magazine vendor to pass before resuming the conversation.

"The Municipal Committee held a meeting yesterday to discuss our current work. Comrade Shih reported on the Central Committee's latest directive. . . . I was going to tell you about it today."

Comrade Shih was the secretary of the underground East Szechuan Party Committee who had recently gone to the Party's South China Bureau to ask for instructions. Hsu Yun-feng had not attended the Municipal Committee meeting or seen Comrade Shih since his return to Chungking because he had been too busy with a new struggle now brewing at the ordnance works. However, Li Ching-yuan could not tell him yet about the South China Bureau's directives because they first had to discuss how to meet the enemy's sudden moves.

Li Ching-yuan stubbed out his cigarette and lowered his voice: "There is one thing that we must give particular attention to. The Municipal Committee believes that since the setting up of the Security Department the enemy has taken a number of measures which can prove dangerous to us. . . . At the meeting Comrade Wei brought up an important piece of inside information. The American Advisory Department at SACO has recently been reshuffled and an international spy, with the rank of brigadier-general, has just arrived. . . . Various signs indicate that this 'visitor' has already managed to get close to the underground Party organization. . . ."

"He's ambitious all right!" Hsu Yun-feng commented smiling, as he cracked the melon seeds. His eyes calmly followed the movements of a peanut vendor who walked by. "This gives quite an international touch to the struggle," he added slowly.

"Precisely! The activities of our newly-arrived 'visitor' and the bookshop incident both show that the enemy is moving according to plan."

They were talking in a very casual tone, but their eyes revealed the seriousness of the situation. If Li Chi-kang's sudden arrival in spite of the rain to call Cheng Ke-chang away had been a sign that the enemy was ready to strike, then the discovery last night of suspicious characters in the vicinity of the bookshop was conclusive evidence that matters had already come to a head.

Hsu Yun-feng's mind was working rapidly. He had a foreboding of danger: What if the U.S.-Chiang secret agents were already a step ahead of them! Another thought occurred to him, and he could not conceal the apprehension in his voice as he said: "It would be very troublesome if something has happened to Fu Chih-kao."

"That man has done something else that's very bad," said Li Ching-yuan. "He has fraudulently used your name to borrow money, by saying that you told him to start a publication. . . . When Cheng Kang objected, he got furious and even accused Cheng Kang of refusing to obey orders."

"No!" Hsu Yun-feng had never imagined that Fu Chih-kao would go so far as to try to obtain money, under false pretences from his former message bearer. He frowned heavily. "This bears out my suspicions! Fu Chih-kao is a dangerous character."

Hsu Yun-feng raised his teacup, took a sip and put it down again. He had pooled information with the Shatse district

secretary last night and found out a lot more about Fu Chih-kao. The District Committee had several times intended to transfer him to some other work, but Fu Chih-kao had always objected on the ground that he was familiar with his job in banking circles. He had been unusually enthusiastic during the last few months. He had been delighted to take over the management of the bookshop, but had also asked to help in the student movement. He had wanted to expand the bookshop, clearly intending to use it to get a foothold in cultural circles and to enhance his own status. Doubtless he intended to get himself into a strong position from which to bargain with the Party after liberation. "Li Ching-yuan, how far would you say his individualism has developed? Does he seem like one of us any more?" asked Hsu Yun-feng.

"Self-interest has befuddled his mind," said Li Ching-yuan gravely, drawing at his cigarette. "He wanted to enlarge the bookshop, and they had provided him with a shop-attendant! He wanted to bring out a magazine, and they would certainly send him an editor. We must not tolerate such people in the future. In fact, we should right now. . . ." He made a cutting gesture.

"You're quite right," Hsu Yun-feng nodded. "Sever all organizational contacts with him at once! We've already bought him a train ticket. When he's handed over his job he can leave Chungking today!"

"You were right not to criticize him too severely last night," Li Ching-yuan continued. "People like him act one way to your face and another behind your back. Criticism is useless. We are facing the enemy now and must deal with him summarily. We have no choice."

Hsu Yun-feng gave rein to his thoughts. "This is a lesson to us. Of course this is also an inevitable social phenomenon. There will still be such people ten or twenty years from now! But to come back to the bookshop and the foreign agent's activities — let's think whether there are any other loopholes. What if Fu Chih-kao went home last night?"

"With a man like that, it's quite possible. Where did you arrange to meet him?"

"At the entrance to the New Life Bazaar."

Li Ching-yuan reflected a moment. "It's too close to here. . . ."

"Yes, it is. Let's go somewhere else to talk!" This teahouse was inside the bazaar and if anything should happen, it would be difficult to get out. Hsu saw from Li Ching-yuan's expression that he agreed and immediately called for the bill.

Li Ching-yuan thought that Lao Hsu's precautions were justified with the new turn of events. Let Fu Chih-kao get to their pre-arranged meeting place first. Hsu Yun-feng could go to meet him after making certain that there was no danger. The waiter approached and Hsu Yun-feng took out his wallet to pay the bill. Li Ching-yuan was just going to light up again when he discovered that his cigarette case was empty. He told Hsu Yun-feng that he was going to get a packet of cigarettes, and would wait for him at the door of the teahouse.

Hsu Yun-feng paid and glanced at his watch. It was still some time before ten. He picked up his newspaper from the table and was about to rise, when Li Ching-yuan suddenly reappeared and called "Lao Hsu" in a low voice.

Hsu Yun-feng looked up and saw that Li Ching-yuan was looking alarmed.

"Plainclothes men outside!"

Hsu Yun-feng turned around and saw several suspicious-looking men among the crowd at the entrance to the teahouse and other plainclothes men guarding all the exits. Just at this moment, Fu Chih-kao was pushing his way into the teahouse followed by two strangers. Knowing that events were moving quickly, Hsu Yun-feng placed his hands on the table and without any change of expression said: "Li Ching-yuan, tell everyone to move at once. Fu Chih-kao has turned a traitor!"

Li Ching-yuan could clearly see that the dragnet was quickly closing around this market place. The danger was increasing by the second. Years of life-and-death struggle under White terror

had taught Li Ching-yuan that if the situation was handled right, it was possible to get away from enemies twice as treacherous. Hsu Yun-feng's fortitude and calmness added to his determination to try a split-second breakthrough. Without hesitation he said: "Let's go!"

But now secret agents searching for Hsu Yun-feng who had been betrayed were stopping the customers at the door.

"Too late," Hsu Yun-feng said rapidly. "Fu Chih-kao doesn't know you. Get out of here at once. Tell the District Committee, Cheng Kang, Liu Sze-yang, Yu Hsin-chiang . . . everyone who has had contacts with Fu Chih-kao to clear out!"

The nearest exit was blocked by plainclothes men. Fu Chih-kao pushed through the crowd, searching for Hsu Yun-feng.

"Don't worry about me . . ." said Hsu Yun-feng. "Go! Leave by the side exit!"

"We will find some way of getting in touch with you!" Li Ching-yuan said firmly, stepping backward. Hsu Yun-feng threw aside the newspaper, stood up and walked towards Fu Chih-kao as if unaware of the danger, and when he knew that his betrayer had seen him, he called out:

"Hello, Fu Chih-kao. Come and sit over here!"

The eyes of all the secret agents immediately turned on Hsu Yun-feng.

Li Ching-yuan quietly strolled out of the side exit with some other customers and actually brushed past the secret agents who were now concentrating all their attention on Hsu Yun-feng. At the doorway he turned around for a last look at Hsu. Li's face was expressionless, but the grief he felt at witnessing the loss of this old comrade-in-arms was unbearable and his eyes grew misty. With a heavy heart, he strode through the cordon of secret agents and out of the New Life Bazaar.

It was nearly ten o'clock in the morning. The plant did not work on Sundays and all was quiet. Cheng Kang was still busily duplicating. The last stack of paper was growing smaller,

sheet by sheet. . . . He must hurry: Li Ching-yuan would be sending someone punctually to get this issue.

The last page was completed. This edition carried the very big news about the recovery of Yenan. It was the communiqué that Li Ching-yuan had inscribed on the stencil the other night. He and Cheng Kang had afterwards read the news of this victory over and over again. Filled with excitement, they had enthusiastically discussed the greater victories yet to come. Cheng Kang hadn't slept the whole night, and the next morning he was still excited by the stirring news.

He had worked through two successive nights but only now that the job was completed did he realize that he was faint from tiredness and that his back and arms were numb. He saw in the mirror that his eyes were bloodshot from lack of sleep.

He piled up the used stencils and burnt them. Then he sorted and folded the printed sheets of paper. He had duplicated 2,500 copies of this five-sheet edition of *Forward.* He must hurry if he were to have everything ready in time. He knew that the victorious recovery of Yenan would greatly encourage the masses and strike a heavy blow at the enemy's attempts to increase arms production.

There was a sound of voices nearby. Perhaps some workers had come from the plant but Cheng Kang had no time to go and see.

He heard footsteps in his bedroom next door. He heard his mother saying in a flustered voice, "Cheng Kang is not at home. He's taken the key with him!" She was talking much louder than she usually did, obviously intending him to hear. Cheng Kang started and stood up. It must be the enemy. Impossible to save the duplicating machine and the printed material now, but maybe he could get away! No, he must not do that. His first duty was to protect the Party organization and safeguard any comrades who might call at the house even if it meant sacrificing himself. Pulling aside the black-out curtains, he opened the window noiselessly, snatched a broom which was always kept in the storeroom and hung it from a nail on the wall

outside. Any comrade coming to his home would see this danger signal and keep away.

Someone was hammering on the door.

Cheng Kang breathed more easily after hanging up the broom. The Party and his comrades were safe. Taking a last glance around, he decided to leave before they broke down the door. But no, he could not let the Party's newspaper fall into the enemy's hands. Turning back, he bundled up the copies of *Forward,* thrust them under his arm and leapt on to the window-sill to jump out. In two minutes he would be in the workers' dormitories where the enemy would never find him.

"Stop!"

"Don't move!"

Shouts rent the air from all sides. Too late! The house was surrounded. Cheng Kang had no choice but to draw back from the window. At that instant the door splintered under the heavy blows. Cheng Kang turned around to face several pistols levelled at his chest.

"Ha! So you are Cheng Kang, Hsu Yun-feng's message bearer!"

Cheng Kang gritted his teeth and made no reply. A secret agent lunged forward and wrenched the bundle out of Cheng Kang's hands.

"What's this, eh? *Forward*!"

From the information Fu Chih-kao had given them, the secret agents only knew that Cheng Kang was Hsu Yun-feng's former message bearer and had not expected to find *Forward* here. This was really a find.

"We've found *Forward*!" they shouted gleefully.

Cheng Kang's heart sank.

"So, Mister Manager, we've found *Forward*'s hide-out!"

Several more agents ran in and pawed through the bundle of newspapers, which Cheng Kang had printed with such painstaking effort, scattering them on the floor and trampling all over them. Cheng Kang was filled with anguish at the sight.

Two of the agents searched Cheng Kang, then led him out, his white-haired mother standing at the doorway. She rushed forward and clasped him to her bosom, shouting at the agents.

"Kill me first, but don't hurt my son!"

The secret agents tugged at Cheng Kang, but he would not move. One of them stretched out his hand to grasp his mother by the collar.

"Just you dare!" roared Cheng Kang and the agent shrank back.

"Let me go, mother. Don't worry about me!" His throat was dry as he tried to comfort her.

His mother hung on desperately to one of the agents, refusing to stand by and watch her son being hauled away by those ruffians! Tears streamed from her eyes and she sobbed brokenheartedly. "In life or death, we'll always be together!"

Not knowing what to do the secret agents watched Cheng Kang and his mother.

"Wait for me, I'll get some clothes. We'll go together," his mother said impulsively. "It won't be just a day or two. . . . If you must suffer, your mother will share your sufferings!"

With pain and love in his eyes, Cheng Kang watched his mother disappear into her own room. He silently wished her goodbye.

Turning around, he saw the secret agents standing as if rooted to the spot and rapped out:

"Move! What are you waiting for?"

Cheng Kang strode down the stairs with the agents at his heels.

Two plainclothes men took up their posts in his bedroom, lurking there in the hope of arresting any possible callers. But the broom hung out by Cheng Kang would safeguard the Party. No messengers would come here any more. . . .

A crowd of workers had gathered blocking the path of the secret agents.

"Get out of the way!" shouted the agents.

"Let go of the manager!" the workers shouted back. "We will kill you bastard agents!"

Cheng Kang recognized many familiar voices.

"Make way, or we'll shoot!"

The workers surged forward fearlessly. "Release our manager! Let him go!"

"Back this way, quick!" directed the leader of the agents, waving his gun.

Cheng Kang was hustled away along a narrow path towards the river.

"The manager has been arrested!"

"After them!"

"Kill the bastards!"

The workers rushed towards the ferry landing, but the secret agents had already jumped aboard a motor launch hidden by the river bank and roared away, the agents were still panting when the launch reached the middle of the river.

While they were recovering their breath, Cheng Kang loosened the ropes around his wrists, and stealthily freed his hands. When his chance came, he sprang at a fellow holding a pair of handcuffs and drove his fist between the man's eyes. With one bound he was on deck and vaulting over the side.

. . .

Hands clutched at his clothes and dragged him back. He struggled with all his might. His throat seemed to be on fire and he saw that the agents had him surrounded. He turned round again and pressed stubbornly against the rail, glaring at the muddy waves of the river like a trapped lion.

Alighting from the bus, Cheng Yao hurried towards Chungshan Park. She was trying her hardest to keep calm, but now and then she peered around uneasily, afraid of being followed. She did not know who wanted to see her or why. The message had been delivered to her at the university, and she had repeated to herself the time and place all the way into town.

Having little experience in underground work, she was very keyed up.

Walking along a tree-lined path in the park, Cheng Yao kept repeating to herself: The third stone bench behind the rockery! Remember, the third bench!

Now she was at the rockery. She counted the benches, one — two — here was the third one. A man sat there, his face hidden behind a newspaper. All she could see was his grey silk gown and black woollen shoes. Who was he? Cheng Yao peered cautiously all round her, and seeing that no one was watching her, she went up to him. She was just considering how to address the stranger, when he lowered the newspaper and greeted her.

"Oh, it's you, Li Ching-yuan!" Cheng Yao exclaimed happily. So it was her brother's good friend who wanted to see her!

"Why are you so flustered, Cheng Yao?" Li Ching-yuan handed her a clean handkerchief, telling her to wipe the sweat from her forehead.

"You don't know how crowded it was on the bus," she said. "I was afraid I couldn't get here in time!"

Li Ching-yuan smiled and slowly stood up. He led Cheng Yao along the shaded paths. They did not speak for some time.

Unaware what was going on in Li Ching-yuan's mind, Cheng Yao was wondering why he did not speak. He had made her come all the way from Shapingpa. Surely he had something to tell her. Should she ask? Cheng Yao didn't quite know what to do, but at last Li Ching-yuan seemed to notice her impatience, and in a soft but firm voice, he asked her: "Cheng Yao, are you brave?"

"What?" asked Cheng Yao, thinking this a strange question. "I'm not afraid of anything!"

"I don't mean that. The bravery I have in mind also implies steadfastness, perseverance and resolution. Let me tell you something. There was a comrade who never feared difficulties, who worked devotedly for the Party, never asking for honour

or reward. Even those most dear to him did not know he was a Party member. He had a secret task, and even his family knew nothing about it. Unfortunately he was arrested. At the time of his arrest, his first thoughts were not for himself, but for the safety of the Party and his comrades. As the enemy was breaking down the door of his room, he calmly hung a broom outside his window, which was the pre-arranged danger signal. He was arrested, but his comrades are safe. Don't you agree that this act of selflessness was bravery? Was he not a courageous man?"

Cheng Yao caught her breath. Her friend Sun Ming-hsia had gone to see her fiancé Liu Sze-yang the previous afternoon and had not returned for a group meeting at the university that morning. Had anything happened to them? Anxiously she asked: "Who was this brave comrade?"

Li Ching-yuan looked deeply into Cheng Yao's eyes and said slowly: "Your brother. He was arrested yesterday."

Cheng Yao gasped and turned pale. She could not believe her ears. She had not been home the previous Sunday, as she had stayed at the university for some activities. She had not the slightest inkling that her brother had been arrested. Pain wrenched at her heart and she could not control her tears.

"Tears will stain the name of a brave man!"

Cheng Yao's eyes were brimming with tears but she stubbornly raised her head: "I'm not crying! I'm his sister. . . . I . . . I will uphold the honour of his name."

Li Ching-yuan was moved. "That's right," he said, "one should be proud to have such a comrade and such a brother!"

Li Ching-yuan then told her about some other arrests.

"Hsu Yun-feng? Yu Hsin-chiang?" Cheng Yao repeated these familiar names, and said without thinking: "This . . . is frightful!"

"Eh? What did you say?"

"No, no! I meant it was a pity!" Cheng Yao's heart contracted with spasms of almost unbearable grief. "I'm bitterly sad, but I'm not afraid."

After a while, Cheng Yao collected herself and said slowly: "Hsu Yun-feng, Yu Hsin-chiang, Cheng Kang — they're all my brothers. I love them, I love my brother. I didn't understand my brother's cautiousness before. Li Ching-yuan, I understand now why you've taken such a risk to see me. . . ."

"I'm not taking a risk. I'm doing my duty to my comrades and to the Party." Then he told Cheng Yao what had happened to Cheng Kang, keeping a careful eye on what was going on around them. He walked arm in arm with Cheng Yao, talking to her like a father in a quiet and comforting voice.

He told her much that she did not know before. He did not however mention that before Cheng Kang's arrest, the Party had already decided to relieve him of the job of producing *Forward*, and had planned to take advantage of his position as manager of the factory and his excellent connections with the director of the ordnance works to reinforce the workers in their struggle.

Cheng Yao remained silent for a long time, biting her bloodless lips, then spoke very solemnly:

"How well you understand him, Li Ching-yuan! You must be even more distressed than I am. . . . I am ashamed of myself. I never knew that my brother was producing *Forward*!" Then she raised her glistening eyes and said as if making a pledge: "No, I must not just be upset, I must be like you! Now I understand love and hatred. I have grown up. I must and I can stand on my own feet. *Forward* must not stop publication. Li Ching-yuan, let me carry on this work!"

They walked slowly towards the zoo. Li Ching-yuan did not give her a direct answer. He said: "A man may play only an insignificant role, but when he gives his all to the revolution he displays the noblest qualities."

Cheng Yao silently savoured the meaning of Li Ching-yuan's words, which sank deep into her heart. She felt herself filled with new strength, ready to make heavy demands on herself. From this day onwards she would always remember those solemn words in times of trouble.

"Can I write to my brother?" she asked after a moment's silence.

"Not for the moment," said Li Ching-yuan. "Wait till we find out where they are being held. The Party will find a way of getting into contact with them."

This was no off-hand reply. He had said the same thing to Hsu Yun-feng when he had been arrested. Despite the enemy's strict control, the Party had managed to get in touch with the comrades in the concentration camps and would expand these contacts in the future.

"Li Ching-yuan! What about *Forward* . . . ?" The question was put in a low voice, but it held a note of urgent pleading.

Cheng Yao watched Li Ching-yuan's lips as she spoke, but he did not answer. He continued to walk, deep in thought. The situation had taken a sudden turn for the worse after the appearance of the traitor in their ranks. A traitor was ten times more dangerous than an ordinary enemy! The few hours that had just passed had been most painful, and a grave test for him. He had not yet had time to report to the Municipal Committee, having first taken all possible steps to withdraw and move the personnel concerned. Then news had come of the arrests of several other comrades! His mind was troubled with other problems: people must be found to take over the work of those arrested, and their dependents must be looked after. The Party's work must be thoroughly re-examined and new arrangements made. There must be no more loopholes for the enemy. Some people were bound to lose their nerve under the present circumstances. To be only aware of the power of the enemy under their nose, they would lose sight of the coming nation-wide victory and become timid and hesitant. But there were also others who would ignore the fact that the enemy was still the stronger and would want to make reckless counter-attacks. After much thought he decided that when he saw Comrade Shih that evening, he would suggest that the Party adopt more stringent precautionary measures, discontinue certain unnecessary activities which might lead to exposure, strengthen

By Wu Chiang-nien

work at the grass-roots level, streamline the organization and become even more firmly established among the masses so that the Party's activities could be completely hidden among them. In this way, the enemy would get an impression that the activities of the underground Party organization had come to a standstill after its recent setbacks, while in fact their work would develop more healthily through an increasing number of mass campaigns. The enemy would soon wake up from his illusory dreams and find himself in hopeless difficulties!

"Li Ching-yuan!" Cheng Yao suddenly grasped him by the sleeve and made him face her. His train of thought was interrupted, but the consciousness of his responsibilities weighed no less heavily on his mind. He liked this spirited girl, who was so much like her brother, and felt a certain responsibility for her, partly because of his fondness for Cheng Kang, and even more because of the bond of affection between one revolutionary and another. Moreover, he wanted to help her on her path to healthy and swift maturity. He wanted to console, encourage and educate this girl who had never experienced the trials of life. That was one of the reasons he had wanted to see her today. However, he was more immediately concerned with her future work. He had already thought the matter over, but did not tell her his decision at once as he wanted to use this opportunity to study and understand her.

"Let me run *Forward*! I'm willing to carry on my brother's work, even if it means sacrificing my life!"

Cheng Yao stood stubbornly in front of Li Ching-yuan, her eyes shining with passionate self-dedication.

Li Ching-yuan felt that he was looking into the depths of her soul, and he liked what he saw. But as usual his face did not betray his emotions.

"*Forward* will naturally continue. Our struggle will never stop!" The confidence in Li Ching-yuan's voice greatly encouraged the young girl. He continued:

"Your brother used to say, 'If a man joins the revolution, he must not be afraid of death. Otherwise, he had better keep out

of it.' You must remember his words. Be a brave, invincible revolutionary like him. But remember that the aim of the revolution is not to sacrifice ourselves, but to wipe out the enemy and advance our cause. Have you ever thought about it that way?"

"I haven't. I'll have to learn how to struggle in the course of struggle!"

Li Ching-yuan nodded and finally told her his decision.

"You cannot go back to the university, because Li Chi-kang knows you. All the students concerned have already been transferred." He put his hand on her shoulder: "From now on your name is Chen Ching. Remember: Chen Ching. You'll be a reporter. Go to the *Chungking Evening News* and see the chief editor, Chao. Here are some identification papers."

"What will my duties be?" asked Cheng Yao without the slightest hesitation.

"You must first go and get your hair permed and buy some cosmetics," Li Ching-yuan said gravely, gazing into Cheng Yao's perplexed eyes. "From now on, you are a reporter. No one must suspect that you are a student. Your superior, Comrade Chao, will explain things to you."

9

THE unexpected windfall had acted as a powerful stimulant on the poisonous spider, and its effect spread to its every nerve. The most fantastic hallucinations gripped the Abode of Benevolence.

A whole series of investigations were being carried out and new plans for action were being drawn up. There were rabid dreams of swiftly widening the breach, of achieving unlimited gains, of making a clean sweep of the underground Party organization. The agents swarmed out of their lairs, and the Investigation Section was busy preparing one of the biggest interrogations it had ever conducted. Even the voices of the radio operators and the tapping of the morse keys seemed to have speeded up.

The mastermind Hsu Peng-fei was sitting in his office on the second floor. Amidst the general exultation he was the only one who seemed able to maintain his composure.

Stacks of folders passed rapidly through his hands. Those he marked "proceed as planned" were immediately sent to the various departments downstairs. Finally there remained only one thick pile containing Fu Chih-kao's statements and information extracted during the nocturnal interrogations. Hsu Peng-fei's cruel face wore an unusual expression of triumph as he laid aside his writing-brush. On the basis of the material at hand and the details which Fu Chih-kao had just supplied, he had formed a complete interrogation plan by which he would seize victory through a surprise attack. But he still had some doubts: Was this material sufficient to subdue the adversary with whom he was about to come to grips? Would

it be enough to make him divulge all the secrets of the underground Party organization?

The telephone bell rang. Hsu Peng-fei picked up the receiver and heard Shen Yang-chai's triumphant laugh at the other end.

"Congratulations! Congratulations! Just as I expected, a new page will be written in the history of espionage. Truly, heroes decide the course of history! Whoever heard of five . . . five Communists arrested in one night? And when that Hsu Yun-feng opens his mouth it won't be five, but fifty, five hundred! Ha, ha! . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei feigned ignorance. "Is that Shen Yang-chai? What are you talking about?"

"The whole free world is agog over this sensation! Don't try to keep me in the dark! You've concentrated all the troops, police, gendarmes and special agents in the city and stopped all outgoing phone calls from the Second Department. You know, the Special Adviser has just specially asked me about this affair." His words were interrupted by guffaws.

Hsu Peng-fei was about to ask him for some more details, but with an ear-splitting cackle Shen Yang-chai hung up.

Shen Yang-chai had become very optimistic and talkative overnight. His congratulations and his laughter had made a big impression on Hsu Peng-fei. Although Shen Yang-chai had not mentioned any details of the Special Adviser's remarks, it was clear that the latter was interested. Li Chi-kang, Cheng Ke-chang and their information had become out of date, as was seen when Chen Sung-lin slipped off the hook. But his lucky find Fu Chih-kao had taken their place.

Hsu Peng-fei put even greater hopes in the interrogations of Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang. If only he succeeded in prying their lips open tonight, his men might uncover the entire Communist Underground! Maybe in a few hours he would — as his old friend had said — have a lot more than five in his net. . . . The workers' and students' movements in Chungking would vanish into thin air, and the victory might extend to the whole of the Southwest, or even to the higher organs of the Com-

munist Party which directed the underground activities. This would be the most glorious chapter in his tempestuous career.

But at the same time, his friend's remarks disquieted him. As the American Adviser already knew about the matter, he must send him a report with some important material at once. But whether he could would depend upon what happened that night. Would things go according to plan? Would his adversary lightly present him with the laurels of victory? He was not at all certain. Furthermore, Fu Chih-kao had mentioned a man by the name of Li, but he had not the slightest clue where to find this man, as Fu Chih-kao had only heard other people mention him.

"If I can get Hsu Yun-feng or Cheng Kang to talk then I'm home." He did not entirely believe Fu Chih-kao's repeated testimony about Cheng Kang. The discovery of *Forward* had been a new and extremely important lead, but Fu Chih-kao had not known anything about it. He had only known that Cheng Kang was Hsu Yun-feng's former message bearer. Maybe Cheng Kang belonged to another section of the underground and was no longer under Hsu Yun-feng. Yes, that was quite possible. That would be why Fu Chih-kao had not known about Cheng Kang producing *Forward*. Perhaps the magazine came under a department of still greater secrecy, and Cheng Kang was working with even more important people. In that case, he might be able to wring another clue out of Cheng Kang which would lead to the heart of the Party Underground.

Hsu Peng-fei selected two files of paper from a thick folio and handed them to Chu Chieh, who was sitting on the sofa awaiting instructions. "Take a look at these two," he said. "Tell me which one of the two people is the more important?"

Hsu Peng-fei was about to entrust him with the vital interrogation but he was plagued by worries. The slightest slip and imminent success might vanish into thin air. He must carefully examine each one of his subordinates.

"This is the more important one," replied Chu Chieh pointing to the file on Hsu Yun-feng. "You have already maintained

that he is the leader of the underground organization. He is the key man who can throw light on the whole secret set up."

"And what about Cheng Kang?"

"An unforeseen and mysterious factor." Chu Chieh had evidently given Cheng Kang much thought.

"Why?" Hsu Peng-fei pursued. "What's your basis for that conclusion?"

"Fu Chih-kao only described Cheng Kang as Hsu Yun-feng's message bearer, but we stumbled upon something quite unexpected in his home!"

Hsu Peng-fei scowled and demanded: "But what is he now? Explain yourself more clearly."

"Sir, I suggest that when Cheng Kang was under Hsu Yun-feng he was a message bearer. *Forward*, which Cheng was managing at the time of his arrest, belongs to another section of the Communist underground organization, no doubt a highly secret part. He may possibly have some sort of connection with that unidentified Li whom Fu Chih-kao mentioned."

"But if Hsu Yun-feng holds a higher position than that of member of the Municipal Committee, then Cheng Kang would still be under his direction." A new thought struck Hsu Peng-fei. Hsu Yun-feng, whom he already had in his grasp, might be a more important figure than he had thought. And why not? Others said that the fish that slipped out of the net were always the biggest, but he fervently hoped that the one in his clutches was the largest and was unwilling to believe that the elusive Li was more important. As he had been unable to get his hands on this Li, Hsu Peng-fei decided not to include him in his report. He was satisfied with Chu Chieh's deductions, and handed him the plan for the interrogation of Cheng Kang, reminding him once more:

"Your adversary is young and spirited, you must break him in the first round."

A telegraph operator stepped into the office and respectfully handed Hsu Peng-fei an urgent telegram from Nanking.

Hsu Peng-fei glanced at it and frowned. They were urging

him to hurry up before the interrogations had even started! He angrily crumpled the paper into a ball, thrust it into his pocket and strode out of the office.

His progress through the building was marked by a sudden silence. With expressions varying from respect to obsequiousness, his subordinates watched him pass. His vanity was flattered and he allowed himself a momentary thin-lipped smile. He must never let anyone guess what was going on in his mind. He deliberately slowed down and walked past the uneasy glances of his underlings with an expressionless face.

The interrogation room had been laid out according to plan, and with satisfactory precision. This somewhat allayed the worries which lurked in his mind. He went over to the window, saw the gathering dusk of the city, and the lights which were going on here and there. Perhaps he could at last bring Chungking under his control. He impulsively stretched out his arms as if to clutch the whole city in an iron embrace.

He walked stiffly and deliberately to the swivel-chair behind the large desk in the middle of the interrogation room. He was suddenly overtaken by a sense of emptiness and doubt. In irritation he turned the chair to face the window, and stared out at the lights of the city. The interrogation was about to begin and he would soon be face to face with an important Communist. He had misgivings and was gnawed by anxiety, but hoped that events would turn out as he wished.

Hsu Peng-fei leaned back in his chair, silent, excited but desperate. Would he succeed or fail? Forcing aside the conjectures that were racing through his mind, he tried to concentrate on the crucial encounter before him.

A man walked in calmly and swept the room with a penetrating gaze.

Hsu Peng-fei was sitting sideways in his swivel-chair, and did not move as the newcomer approached, merely glancing at him out of the corners of his eyes. The man had a high, deeply etched forehead which suggested strength of character. His gaunt face

was expressionless, except for a look of cool detachment in his eyes, and a bleak smile on his lips.

Wei Chi-po, who was to act as assistant interrogator and take down the statements, stepped up to Hsu Peng-fei and whispered: "That is the famous Hsu Yun-feng!"

Hsu Peng-fei had a start. The cool detachment of this man would be a ticklish thing to handle. He pulled himself together and reflected that the only way to deal with such a man was to strike him with lightning-like blows. That was the only way to shake his nerve and rob him of his composure.

Hsu Peng-fei abruptly turned his head and stared intently at his adversary. A haughty sneer twisted his lips as he barked:

"Do you know why you have been arrested, eh?"

Hsu Yun-feng turned away to look at the lights of the city without replying.

"We know everything about you!" Hsu Peng-fei suddenly spun around in his swivel-chair and sat up stiffly, "You are Hsu Yun-feng, a key figure in the Communist Party Underground in Chungking!"

The golden insignia on his collar gleamed, and Hsu Yun-feng realized that he was facing the chief of the secret agents in Southwest China. He could read doubt and uncertainty in his enemy's restless eyes and tightly clenched fists, despite his arrogant front and affected calm.

"Why all this bluster?" he asked, sitting down on a nearby chair.

His attitude seemed calculated to mock at and provoke the enemy whose bombastic exterior covered such fatal weaknesses.

Hsu Peng-fei was dumbfounded by this casual indifference, and was unable to collect his wits for a moment. Gaping at the calm and authoritative Hsu Yun-feng he stammered:

"Please, please be seated. . . ."

So this is my adversary, thought Hsu Yun-feng, quietly appraising him. This was a secret cross-examination, yet Hsu Peng-fei in his vanity had not removed the major-general's insignia which disclosed his identity. He was clearly a man who

always overestimated his own strength, liked to show off, and counted largely on luck to get results. His class instinct would inevitably cause him to commit blunders and prematurely expose his hand. Hsu Yun-feng coolly waited to see what tactics he would use.

The veins stood out on Hsu Peng-fei's forehead as he forced a sneer, picked up a ledger from the desk, weighed it in his hand and said with apparent indifference:

"There are hundreds of items of information here, all concerning you . . . Hsu Yun-feng. Arrived in Chungking in 1938. No steady occupation. . . ." He then opened the ledger, flipped over several pages, and tossed it to Wei Chi-po who was sitting stiffly beside him.

"Read him a few items — any will do," he said with studied negligence.

Wei Chi-po started to read tonelessly:

"CB* number 27018. 1945. Secret reports pertaining to the Hu Shih-ho** incident at the Electric Power Company reveal that a certain leading Communist named Hsu has repeatedly insinuated himself into the said company to stir up riots. . . .

"CB number 40034. 1946. According to information supplied by the factory police of the Tatukou Iron and Steel Plant, a person under the assumed name of Lao Yang has surreptitiously entered the plant on various occasions to direct the March 23 riots.*** Investigations reveal that Yang's description corresponds to that of the aforementioned Hsu. . . .

"CB. . . . It has been established that Hsu was originally a worker at the Yangtze Ordnance Works. During the Anti-

* CB stands for "Chungking Bandit."

** An electrical worker murdered by a secret agent. The entire city's electrical workers called a general strike and used the funeral procession to demonstrate. Supported by the Chinese Communist Party and people from all walks of life, they forced the KMT to execute the murderer.

*** The KMT suppressed a workers' demonstration demanding wage increase. Eight were killed and many wounded. The city's arms workers went on a sympathetic strike.

Japanese War he was the Communist Party's. . . ."

Hsu Yun-feng sat motionless under Hsu Peng-fei's scrutiny. There was nothing strange in the fact that the enemy had collected some odds and ends of information during his many years of work in Chungking. He continued to sit unperturbed, occasionally glancing out of the window.

Hsu Peng-fei took a faded photograph from another ledger and handed it to Hsu Yun-feng. It showed a blurred profile, vaguely resembling himself. It had been taken when he wasn't aware of it. Hsu Peng-fei said: "Three years ago you went to No. 50 Tseng Chia Yen, Chou Residence. Remember? You left us this snapshot as a souvenir. Who'd have thought that three years later we'd be able to show it to you in person!"

Yes, Hsu Yun-feng remembered the occasion. He had just returned from Yenan and had gone to the South China Bureau of the Communist Party's Central Committee to get his new directives. The office had been in the outlying Tseng Chia Yen district, and as Comrade Chou En-lai had lived there, people still called the house the "Chou Residence." It was close to the home of the top Kuomintang secret agent Tai Li, and could only be reached by going along a narrow path. Special agents had been quartered in the compound and even in the upper storey of the building. It was not surprising that they had snapped him while he was passing the gate-keeper's lodge. Nevertheless, the fact that they had been able to assemble and classify all this material within a few hours showed him the need for greater vigilance.

"I don't think you can deny these facts." Hsu Peng-fei was now showing off, pretending to solicit his adversary's opinion. However, Hsu Yun-feng's abrupt answer shattered his hopes.

"You would never have found me in this city of a million people on such scrappy information alone! If it weren't for that traitor, you wouldn't have recognized me even if I'd been standing right before your eyes."

"Quite right!" Hsu Peng-fei's confidence rose again. He thought he had found a weapon in Hsu Yun-feng's words. "Your

'comrade' Fu Chih-kao is now my assistant. He has given me complete and detailed information about you and will help me find many more people!"

"It's a pity that the traitor must also have told you that you won't be able to lay your hands on any more Communists," said Hsu Yun-feng with complete composure. "Otherwise, how can you explain your special interest in me rather than in that traitor? But let me tell you, although I have all the information you so much desire, the only thing you will get out of me is a headache!"

Hsu Peng-fei vaguely felt that he had given too much away, and that his thrusts had not found their mark. What could he do to shake Hsu Yun-feng's nerve? Would a display of anger open his tightly-sealed lips? Or torture? No, only the most clumsy idiot would attempt to drag information out of this dauntless adversary by such means.

He began to have doubts about his strategy. Why had he found every step so painful and been on the defensive from the very outset of this encounter? He seemed to hear whispered comments outside the room. . . . This interrogation was the key to victory, the basis of all future action. The whole operation hinged on surmounting this vital obstacle. He must not fail!

"Naturally, we are very much interested in you," went on Hsu Peng-fei in a voice as cold as ice. "Nevertheless, we could also lose all interest in you. The information we have at hand alone is sufficient to. . . ." The last words were spoken slowly and held an unspoken threat. He paused an instant and suddenly switched to a new tack. "However, I am putting myself in your place and thinking of your best interests!"

Hsu Yun-feng merely glanced at his adversary and turned away.

"Mark my words! Class struggle is a cruel and gory business." Hsu Peng-fei suddenly raised his voice, unable to bear the other's mocking attitude any longer. He was now convinced that only by giving his adversary a severe shock could he subdue him and

gain the upper hand. "If you refuse to follow in Fu Chih-kao's footsteps, another road is open to you!"

Hsu Peng-fei suddenly pointed to the other side of the room. A strong light dazzled Hsu Yun-feng. Hsu Peng-fei sprang to his feet and walked forward.

A heavy iron door in the wall creaked open and an even more dazzling glare came from the torture cell behind it. Gusts of cold air carried the reek of blood to Hsu Yun-feng's nostrils.

"Take a look!" said Hsu Peng-fei with an evil grin, as he lit his lighter and drew deeply on a cigarette.

A torn, bleeding body was lying on the concrete floor, with heavy fetters on its ankles. Blood was still dripping from the motionless figure.

Several hairy-chested men stood over him, holding gory whips. One of them picked up a brown leather jacket and with a hideous laugh tossed it towards the unconscious man.

Hsu Peng-fei pointed with his cigarette at the body on the floor. "Perhaps you know this man?"

Hsu Yun-feng cared nothing for his enemy's threats, but the blood on the floor aroused his fury. How many thousands of people had been subjected to this treatment in this evil den!

Hsu Peng-fei's next words chilled him to the bone. "Your former message bearer, Manager Cheng Kang!"

What? Had Cheng Kang been arrested? This was one up for the traitor.

Hsu Yun-feng rushed forward. He raised Cheng Kang and clasped him tightly to his chest. With tears in his eyes he brushed away the lock of hair covering Cheng Kang's eyes, wiped the blood from his pale cheeks and stared into his unconscious face.

"I told you it was a cruel business! How can you remain indifferent to the sight of your comrades being tortured?"

Hsu Yun-feng jerked up his head, glared furiously at the vile brutes around him; then noticing Hsu Peng-fei's provocative manner, he immediately calmed himself. He could not afford to let a cheap outburst of emotion take the place of

struggle. Loss of composure was just what the enemy was hoping for! He glared angrily at Hsu Peng-fei but did not say a word. Hsu Peng-fei could not endure this painful silence. He had to do his utmost to try and keep up the atmosphere of terror which was causing his adversary so much distress.

"Even if you don't care about yourself, you should surely do everything possible to save the lives of your comrades! How callous you are! For the sake of your own reputation, you would send countless numbers of your subordinates to their deaths. You would let others pay for your stubbornness with their lives. You know the saying 'A general builds his success on ten thousand bleaching bones.' I really hadn't thought I'd find such feudal traits in you, Mister Hsu — you, a self-styled Communist!"

The furious look on Hsu Yun-feng's face had gradually disappeared and was now replaced by a scornful smile. Hsu Peng-fei was baffled. Tossing away his cigarette, he asked: "What are you smiling at? Why don't you talk?"

"I'm smiling at you. . . ." Hugging the unconscious Cheng Kang, he said: "We Communists have no common language with people like you, but, I can tell you one thing: the victory of the people's revolution can only be won at great costs! We Communists consider it our greatest pride and joy to make such sacrifices for the sake of victory!"

"What!" exclaimed Hsu Peng-fei, recoiling a step.

"Your class nature dooms you to impotence. You are entirely incapable of understanding the great sentiments of a Communist!"

Hsu Peng-fei fell into a nonplussed silence.

Hsu Yun-feng proudly declared: "Let me tell you, apart from seeing things which you will not possibly understand, you will gain nothing from Cheng Kang, nor from any of us! I am proud to lead such staunch comrades as Cheng Kang. He's an honour to the Party."

Cheng Kang stirred a little. Hsu Yun-feng looked down and softly called his name.

"Cheng Kang! Cheng Kang!"

Hsu Peng-fei was seized by a desperate hope, and flinging aside a cigarette he had just lit, he said in a loud and menacing voice:

"Let me tell you that we have arrested more than just Cheng Kang. Your organization has been completely destroyed."

The organization completely destroyed? Cheng Kang started and seemed to come round. He twitched spasmodically and tried to clench his fists. No, that was impossible! He had hung the broom outside the window. . . . The enemy would never get Li Ching-yuan. They could not possibly get him! Cheng Kang tried to shout, but his voice was so weak that it came out like a delirious mumble.

"You . . . cannot destroy . . . the Party's . . . organization. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei planted himself in front of Cheng Kang who was now regaining consciousness, and barked:

"Speak! Who are your leaders?"

"The Central Committee!" Cheng Kang managed to shout. "Chairman Mao!"

Hsu Yun-feng drew Cheng Kang closer to him and his eyes flashed fire. "The Central Committee! Chairman Mao! Well said."

"Talk! Who is your immediate superior?" roared Hsu Peng-fei.

"You'll never get him," Cheng Kang waved his fist weakly.

"Cheng Kang! Cheng Kang! Wake up!" Hsu Yun-feng called.

Someone was calling his name, right in his ear. Cheng Kang opened his eyes with a great effort, but everything whirled before him and he shut them again.

"Cheng Kang!"

Whose voice was that? So close and so familiar? Was it Li Ching-yuan? No. But who was it then? Why did it sound like Lao Hsu? Cheng Kang twisted about and opened his eyes. A face he knew swam across his vision, but he dared not believe what he saw. Were his weakened senses playing tricks on him?

He strained to make his eyes focus. He could now make out the warm smile on Lao Hsu's face. It was really him.

"Cheng Kang!"

"Lao Hsu!"

Tears streamed from Cheng Kang's eyes. So Lao Hsu too had been arrested. No! He shouldn't have been arrested! He would gladly give his own life for Lao Hsu's freedom. Cheng Kang put his arms around Hsu Yun-feng and, overcome by his emotions, lost consciousness again.

Hsu Peng-fei had closely watched the "reunion" he had arranged. At last he had discovered something tangible. Why were Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang so close to each other? Surely this couldn't just be what the Communists called "proletarian comradeship." There must be another, deeper connection. How else could one account for such a strong affection between a superior and his former subordinate? Cheng Kang must have let slip a secret. You cannot get hold of my leader, he had said, but as soon as he had recognized Hsu Yun-feng he had fainted from emotion. Yes, Hsu Yun-feng must still be Cheng Kang's superior. Hadn't Hsu Yun-feng just said "I am proud to lead such staunch comrades as Cheng Kang"? That meant that *Forward* was also under Hsu Yun-feng's leadership! Hsu Peng-fei now tried to provoke his adversary into betraying something that would bear out his observations.

"I already have complete information as well as material evidence about the organizational relations between the two of you. You ought to believe me now, Mr. Hsu."

Material evidence? Hsu Yun-feng knew that the only thing they could have found at Cheng Kang's place was *Forward.* With absolute confidence he declared: "You cannot destroy *Forward.* You'll see proof of that before three days are out!"

"*Forward*?" Hsu Peng-fei let the word out in his excitement. How could Hsu Yun-feng know about the connection between Cheng Kang and *Forward* unless the underground paper was under his direct leadership? Yes, Fu Chih-kao had said that he'd used Hsu Yun-feng's name to try and borrow money from

Cheng Kang, but they had immediately seen through this subterfuge. His appraisal had evidently been right; they had very close and secret contact, and Hsu Yun-feng was unquestionably Cheng Kang's superior and in charge of *Forward*. In that case, Hsu was even more important than previously anticipated.

Hsu Peng-fei felt that this was the best result of the night's cross-examination. He must immediately report this development to Nanking. Now he should widen this breach and exploit the situation to win complete victory. The smug expression on his face gave away his train of thought.

"It is impossible for you to conceal your position."

"You will find out no more than what the traitor can tell you."

"That — may or may not be so!" Hsu Peng-fei looked first at Hsu Yun-feng and then at Cheng Kang. "Speak up! Who's his superior?" Hsu Peng-fei demanded.

"Superior?" Hsu Peng-fei's expression revealed to Hsu Yun-feng that he was being suspected to be the man in charge of *Forward*! He decided to lead the enemy off the track in order to protect the Party Underground and Li Ching-yuan. Supporting the badly injured Cheng Kang, he slowly rose to his feet, and said with quiet dignity:

"I am a member of the Municipal Committee of the underground Party organization as well as secretary of the workers' movement. Perhaps you don't know of my relations with *Forward*. . . ."

"Lao Hsu — you? You?" exclaimed Cheng Kang who had just regained consciousness. His distended eyes met Hsu Yun-feng's calm gaze. Hsu Yun-feng lowered his head and explained:

"The renegade has already told the enemy." Then looking Hsu Peng-fei straight in the eye, he continued calmly: "The traitor may not even know, but I am in charge of *Forward*."

Cheng Kang clutched Hsu Yun-feng's shoulders. He knew that Lao Hsu had never had anything to do with *Forward*, which was run by Li Ching-yuan, who had taken it over from Sister Chiang. Hsu Yun-feng must be deliberately diverting

the enemy's attention to himself to keep them from finding out more secrets and to protect the Party and his comrades.

"Lao Hsu!" Cheng Kang cried, and hugged him tightly. After a while he continued: "Lao Hsu. . . ." A lump rose in his throat and he said almost inaudibly: "I saw . . . Yu Hsin-chiang. He's been arrested too. . . ."

He had to take this opportunity to report this to Hsu Yun-feng. The name "Yu Hsin-chiang" had not been above a whisper, but Lao Hsu had understood. He said confidently:

"The turncoat can betray no more than these!"

Hsu Peng-fei had been closely watching the expressions on the faces of Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang. He leapt on the chance to cut in and say icily:

"We have got someone much more important — Liu Sze-yang!"

Cheng Kang had no idea who Liu Sze-yang was. Hsu Yun-feng, however, knew that Liu Sze-yang was a comrade of theirs and the guarantor of the bookshop. With Fu Chih-kao's betrayal, the arrest of Liu Sze-yang was almost inevitable. Hsu Yun-feng's arms tightened around Cheng Kang and he said with feeling: "A few Communists less will not affect the great people's revolutionary movement in the least! The red flag of communism will fly over the whole world whether we're alive or not!"

"What use are these fine words in the present situation?" drawled Hsu Peng-fei. As he watched his two adversaries, he reviewed his achievements so far. The relation between Cheng Kang and Hsu Yun-feng had been established. Obviously the key to all the secrets was with these two, particularly with Hsu Yun-feng. How could he make them say more? It wasn't necessary to waste any more time on details. The time had come to put the pressure on and undermine their loyalty. He was confident that if one wavered, the other could be easily dealt with. His voice took on a harsher note:

"You should understand that your fate isn't in your own hands; it's in mine! For your own sake, you should think

things over carefully. . . . I don't ask you to go through any formalities and I'm not demanding a price. All I want is a written self-confession, and your circumstances will immediately change."

So saying he pushed forward a sheet of paper and a writing-brush. Avoiding the almost imperceptible smile on Hsu Yun-feng's face, he directed a severe look at Cheng Kang.

"I give you my word of honour that if you write a confession, I will release you immediately."

Hsu Yun-feng glanced disdainfully at the enemy and calmly said: "Communists are never afraid to state their views."

This gave Cheng Kang an idea. He drew himself up in spite of the pain which wracked his body, and dragging the heavy fetters on his ankles, he advanced under the agents' stare, and stood before the paper and brush on the table. His eyes swept the room, then slowly stretching out a bloody hand he lifted the brush and wrote firmly on the paper with firm strokes: My Confession. He reflected a moment, then evidently disliking the word confession, dipped his brush in the ink once more and with a flourish added punctuation marks, so that it read:

My "Confession"

The bold characters covered the whole sheet of paper. Cheng Kang's breast was heaving. No longer able to suppress his mounting emotions, he hurled the brush aside and began to declaim right in front of the enemy's face:

Though heavy chains clank on my feet,
Though you may swing your leather whips,
I have nothing to confess,
Unafraid of blood-stained bayonets at my breast.

For no true man will bow his head,
And none but craven cowards seek your "freedom";
What do I care if you torture me?
Not death itself can make me speak.

I laugh aloud in face of death.
My laughter shakes the halls of the devils,
This is my confession as a Communist,
Ringing the funeral knell of the Chiang dynasty.

"Splendid, Cheng Kang!" Hsu Yun-feng strode forward, and putting his hands on Cheng Kang's shoulder, he said in ringing tones:

"Let us stand facing the dawn of victory
And watch the red sun of communism rise in the East!"

Hsu Peng-fei was flushed and livid by turns, and the veins were standing out on his forehead. He now knew that it was impossible to undermine the loyalty of either of these two. He had been on the verge of stopping Cheng Kang several times, but he had restrained himself so as to show his broad-mindedness. Now he decided to take Cheng Kang's "insolence" as an excuse for a show of anger. What kind of a cross-examination was this in which they dared challenge him so openly?

"Silence! Remember where you are."

Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang stood shoulder to shoulder as they answered fearlessly:

"Our answer is the same, no matter where we are!"

"Humph! Maybe you can bear eight or ten kinds of American torture, but not all forty-eight!"

"Even eighty-four would not make a Communist budge an inch," was the steely reply.

"This is the domain of our American allies and the Kuomintang, not a place where you can play around. I can flay three layers of skin from a god! I can make a skeleton open its mouth and confess!" roared Hsu Peng-fei. "Hsu Yun-feng, don't be such a fool! You're no longer a leading member of the Communist Party, you are a criminal arrested under the emergency security regulations. You are in my hands!"

"We are in your hands?" Hsu Yun-feng broke into laughter. He spread out his arms and brought them together in a powerful sweep, as though crushing his stupefied adversary. "You fell into the people's encirclement long ago. You will find no way of escaping your doom!"

Hsu Peng-fei paled and words failed him. He could not

bear being talked to in such tones of judgment. There was still, however, one more way by which he might bring them to their knees, and while Cheng Kang was declaiming his poem, he had decided to resort to this final method.

He shouted for his assistants and ordered: "Tell the firing squad to assemble at once!"

Hsu Peng-fei raised his arm and glanced at his watch.

"I give you just three more minutes. Think carefully. Either you talk, or you'll be shot!"

Unperturbed, Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang stood arm-in-arm. In this moment of final parting, they looked at each other with absolute faith and trust in their eyes. Both were calm, happy in the knowledge that their lives could protect the Party and their numerous comrades. They awaited death with full confidence in final victory.

A heavy silence enveloped the sinister building, a silence broken only by the ticking of the clock.

"One more minute!"

The second-hand crept forward. The last minute seemed interminably long.

"Will you or won't you talk?"

"We will not!" shouted Cheng Kang. "You can cut off our heads or make us bleed, but you can never break the will of a Communist!"

Hsu Yun-feng's voice came quietly, but it struck Hsu Peng-fei like a blow: "Torture has failed, and so will the firing squad."

"Take Cheng Kang away first!" shouted Hsu Peng-fei, his eyes blazing at Hsu Yun-feng.

The executioners rushed in and grabbed Cheng Kang.

"Take your dirty hands off me! I can walk by myself!" snapped Cheng Kang. Then he said to Hsu Yun-feng: "Lao Hsu, I will go first."

Dragging his heavy fetters, he proudly walked past Hsu Peng-fei, who involuntarily recoiled a few steps, and then raised his hand.

"Wait!" He turned to Hsu Yun-feng and asked: "Have you anything more to say?"

"Just what I have already said: Torture has failed, and so will the firing squad!"

Hsu Peng-fei stamped and yelled: "Take him away!" Cheng Kang was hustled out with the sound of heavy footsteps and clanking fetters.

Hsu Peng-fei looked at Hsu Yun-feng's calm face, hesitated, then suddenly turned around again and bellowed:

"Execute those already interrogated at the same time!"

The sound of tramping feet could be heard approaching the building. They passed right under the window. Defiant voices shouted slogans. Hsu Peng-fei grinned diabolically.

"This is the end for Liu Sze-yang and his fiancée!"

The stirring shouts of his comrades sent deep emotion flooding through Hsu Yun-feng. He distinguished the ringing voices of Cheng Kang and Yu Hsin-chiang.

"Long live the Chinese Communist Party! Long live Chairman Mao!"

"Long live the victory of the people's revolution!"

A sharp command rang out: "Take aim!"

Hsu Yun-feng's eyes were moist, and there was a reverent smile on his face: "Farewell, comrades!"

"You dare to smile!" roared Hsu Peng-fei, stung to fury by this incomprehensible reaction, "I'll have you shot immediately. . . ."

"At your convenience!" Hsu Yun-feng stepped forward. He felt no fear, only respect for his courageous comrades and disdain for the helpless enemy.

"No! No!" Hsu Peng-fei fell backwards, then steadied himself and once more advanced upon Hsu Yun-feng.

"I will shoot the others in front of your eyes, but you will go to prison! I will have Fu Chih-kao tell all the political prisoners that you betrayed the Party and your comrades!" His voice rose to a bellow: "I want to watch those political prisoners tear out your throat! I want to watch you die like a cur at

the hands of your own comrades! I want to see your name forever dishonoured!"

"If you send me to the concentration camp with that traitor," replied Hsu Yun-feng scornfully, "you will soon see that the result will be just the opposite of your hopes."

"What?" Hsu Peng-fei shuddered, then rushed frantically towards the window and roared:

"Fire!"

A volley rang out, reverberating through the halls of this abode of evil. The lights of Chungking flickered in the darkness outside.

Hsu Peng-fei listened to the echoes of the shots in helpless frustration. He realized that he had failed completely. . . .

10

THE chandelier threw many colours on the sculptured ceiling and filled the reception room with a soft, warm glow. On the walls hung portraits. Among them were those of Rear-Admiral Miles, Vice-Director of the SACO and a U.S. imperialist agent; Tai Li, the late boss of the Kuomintang secret agents; and Mao Jen-feng, Director of the Bureau of Confidential Information — they were objects of particular veneration in the home of secret agent Hsu Peng-fei. His wife had just put up a signed photograph of Chiang Kai-shek that Chu Shao-liang had given him on behalf of the Generalissimo at the decoration ceremony that morning. Two other photographs were also on display: one of the Special Adviser warmly shaking hands with Hsu Peng-fei after pinning on him an American medal, and the other of Hsu Peng-fei smiling broadly as Mao Jen-feng awarded him the First Class Order of the Army, Navy and Air Force.

The reception room was filled with people, and Mrs. Hsu flitted in and out among her guests, intent on her duties as hostess.

A car sounded its horn and a ripple of excitement swept the room. "Peng-fei!" called out Mrs. Hsu. All aflutter, she stood on tiptoe, crying: "Our guest of honour is coming. Go and welcome him! Hurry!"

The horn sounded again, this time closer. A streamlined car flying the Stars and Stripes swished up the drive and glided to a halt at the door.

"The Special Adviser," someone was heard to say. The guests crowded towards the entrance of the reception room, lining up to greet the distinguished American guest.

Hsu Peng-fei strode down the steps and bent down to open the door of the car. The man who stepped out, however, was Shen Yang-chai.

"Where's the Special Adviser?" asked Hsu Peng-fei.

"He was just coming when he was delayed by an urgent telegram from Washington. He asked me to convey his apologies, and promised to come to the dance."

"Did the Special Adviser say anything else?" the chagrined Hsu Peng-fei asked as Shen Yang-chai walked slowly up the steps. When the guests had dispersed, Shen Yang-chai murmured:

"He said that he would be delighted to continue to co-operate with you. However, he said. . . ."

"Said what?" asked Hsu Peng-fei, suddenly tense.

"The Special Adviser maintains that morale at Special District Headquarters has been very low recently. He says that our immediate task is to tighten discipline and to revive and further the spirit of the Miles era — the spirit which prevailed in the early days of SACO. He said we needed a great deal of up-to-date equipment: wireless sets for direct communication with Washington, meteorological radar, and high altitude reconnaissance equipment. . . . The Special Adviser particularly emphasized that our backward techniques must be brought up to date in the shortest time possible."

Hsu Peng-fei unhesitatingly expressed his approval.

"Quite so. This should have been done long ago!" Hsu Peng-fei kept his eyes on Shen Yang-chai's lips, hoping to hear more. He very much admired the energy and ambition of the new Special Adviser and felt that the importance the American placed on him and on secret service work had considerably bolstered his prestige.

"Yes, history has given us the mission to promote the Miles spirit and to carry forward Miles' international cause," said Hsu Peng-fei. He was sure that the plans to expand SACO would be of the greatest advantage to him as Director of the Security Department. With the backing of the American adviser, he

would soon be firmly established as the kingpin of the MIB in Southwest China.

"The Special Adviser also mentioned the question of security. . . ."

"Right! This must not be overlooked. Security should be particularly strict at the Special District Headquarters. The personnel at all key SACO departments as well as at the banks, warehouses, hospitals, canteens, bars and coal mines, should all be individually screened. Not a single unreliable element must be allowed to remain!"

As Hsu Peng-fei spoke, he pushed open the glass door and strode jauntily into the reception room.

Mrs. Hsu and Mao Jen-feng had just come out of the inner room. Seeing Hsu Peng-fei walking in, she clapped her hands lightly and in her sweetest tones said:

"This small family dinner is to welcome our Director, Mao Jen-feng. We haven't invited many guests, only our closest friends. I hope you will enjoy yourselves." When she finished, Mrs. Hsu took the short, fat Mao Jen-feng familiarly by the arm and invited him to sit at her side. She knew that she need not worry about the other guests, as Hsu Peng-fei could manage them perfectly well; she would devote herself to the Director.

The long dinner table was loaded with a sumptuous repast. Mrs. Hsu sat down in the hostess' seat and said apologetically:

"Director, I hope you will try some of these dishes. There aren't any good chefs in Chungking, and we've only got Russian cooking. . . . The drinks aren't bad though — American champagne and French wine. When you came to Chungking during the Anti-Japanese War I remember you took a fancy to Maotai spirits from Kweichow Province. So I specially got a few bottles of well-matured Maotai. Let's all drink a toast of welcome to our Director. . . ."

Mrs. Hsu raised her glass, but Mao Jen-feng tapped her soft white arm, indicating that his gracious hostess should wait a moment. He stood up, raised his glass with a smile, and as if at a diplomatic gathering, bowed first to Mrs. Hsu, then said:

"I would first like to express my thanks to our charming hostess for her hospitality. I would also like to take this opportunity to tell you some good news. . . ." He paused, and prolonged clapping filled this interval in his speech. "Hsu Peng-fei's recent operations have been in the best traditions of the MIB. His revolutionary actions have dealt a crushing blow to the subversive activities of the Communist bandits. Credit should go both to the Second Department and to the Special District Headquarters. The latter supplied the clue, while the Second Department was chiefly responsible for the subsequent developments. To reward those who have distinguished themselves, the Bureau of Confidential Information has decided to promote Yen Tsui, formerly the Director of Southwest Special District, to the position of Special Commissioner of the Bureau. He will leave for Nanking immediately to take up his new duties. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei's self-possessed gaze rested briefly on Yen Tsui. Just as he expected, there was not a trace of a smile on Yen Tsui's pockmarked face. The announcement had taken him completely by surprise.

"Yen Tsui's former duties as Director of the Southwest Special District will be taken over by Hsu Peng-fei."

There was a flurry of comment among the richly-gowned, bejewelled wives.

"Ah! So Hsu Peng-fei will be in charge of both the secret and non-secret branches! This is unprecedented!"

Mao Jen-feng finished speaking, and with a smile he raised his wine glass.

"My congratulations! I suggest we drink a toast."

Hsu Peng-fei, looking very modest, stood up and emptied his glass. He waited until Mao Jen-feng had sat down and then said:

"I thank the party and the government for this honour. Friends, let us all drink to the health of our one and only leader, the Generalissimo! *Kanpei*! (Bottoms up!)"

Hsu Peng-fei picked up a second glass and walked over to Mao Jen-feng.

"I propose a toast to the brilliant leadership of our Director!"

More calls of *kanpei*!

Flushed with pleasure and wine, Mao Jen-feng emptied his glass, and Mrs. Hsu again refilled it.

Hsu Peng-fei proposed a third toast.

"Ladies and gentlemen! Let us drink another toast to our common victory!"

"*Kanpei*! *Kanpei*!"

Hsu Peng-fei noticed that Yen Tsui was sitting motionless and had not even picked up his glass. Hsu Peng-fei frowned slightly at this discordant note. Filling his glass, he sauntered over to Yen Tsui and patted him cordially on the shoulder.

"Yen Tsui, I sincerely admire your operational technique. My congratulations on your promotion! Here's to our common cause!"

Yen Tsui was not as cheerless as Hsu Peng-fei had first thought. True, he did look a bit displeased, but he seemed rather indifferent to the trick Mao Jen-feng and Hsu Peng-fei had pulled off behind his back. He stood up very politely, and with a placid expression on his pockmarked face, clinked glasses with Hsu Peng-fei, saying: "I admire your astuteness, Peng-fei. I wish you further success!"

He raised his glass towards Shen Yang-chai, his face wreathed in smiles. "You too must be included in this toast. I compliment you on being so well-informed, and on receiving a medal in addition to being commended for meritorious service."

Yen Tsui once more filled his glass and walked up to Mao Jen-feng.

"Thank you for this promotion, sir. Won't you join me in a toast?"

"Very well, I hope you will soon take up your new duties."

After drinking up, Yen Tsui again filled Mao Jen-feng's glass. "Director, I have a small request. Would you grant me permission not to go to Nanking for the time being?"

"Oh?"

"I intend to go to the United States," Yen Tsui said calmly. "The Federal Bureau of Investigation recently cabled me, offering me a position as a high-ranking adviser."

This news set the tongues of the ladies wagging anew. "Ah, Director Yen is going to the United States! You know, he received his training there, the Special Adviser used to be his teacher!"

"So you're going abroad to further your education? Excellent, excellent!"

Mao Jen-feng took the bottle from Yen Tsui and filled his glass to the brim, then announced with a beaming face: "You should be given still another title: Special Commissioner of the Defence Ministry to survey secret service work in the United States. We must all drink to this!"

"Director, I have another little matter to report to you. The Special Adviser would like me to select a few promising young men from the Special District Headquarters to go with me, including Li Chi-kang. . . ."

"You know the personnel here, so take your choice. And how about some from the Northwest Special District? Yes, and many people from Northeast and North China have recently returned to Nanking. We can consider sending a few more," Mao Jen-feng was all in favour of the suggestion. "The United States Government has been considering possible developments and is preparing for the worst. It has recently decided on an all-round strengthening of Sino-American cooperation in the secret service field, with particular emphasis on the improvement of intelligence techniques. Your coming trip conforms in letter and in spirit to the agreement on secret service work which I have just signed with the U.S. authorities . . . !"

This was startling news to Hsu Peng-fei, but he quickly composed himself, hurriedly filled two glasses with champagne and walked across to Yen Tsui. Patting his shoulder, he said:

"A thousand cups of wine are not too many when drinking

with close friends. Do me the honour of joining me. I wish you bon voyage. When you get to Washington, please give my regards to my old superior, Rear-Admiral Miles."

"Yes, you must certainly drink to that, Yen Tsui. *Kanpei*!"

At this moment, Mao Jen-feng's personal aide strode briskly into the dining-room, handed Mao Jen-feng an official dispatch, and whispered in his ear. Mao Jen-feng picked up the heavy folder but did not open it. His face had suddenly become grim and he rose from the table, ignoring the plea in Mrs. Hsu's beguiling eyes.

Hsu Peng-fei, who was drinking with Yen Tsui, looked up to see Mao Jen-feng beckoning angrily. He hurriedly emptied his glass and followed his superior into the next room, carefully closing the door behind him.

The guests fell into an uncomfortable silence, and Mrs. Hsu did her best to keep a calm exterior, as with a forced smile she invited them to drink another toast.

Mao Jen-feng was sitting on an armchair in the next room with a worried Hsu Peng-fei standing beside him. Mao motioned Hsu to sit down.

Mao Jen-feng slowly tore open the official envelope, and out fell several sheets of pink typing-paper.

"*Forward*!" ejaculated Hsu Peng-fei.

Mao Jen-feng unfolded the sheets. *Forward* printed in big type jumped at Hsu Peng-fei's eyes. He looked at the bold headlines in consternation: "People of Chungking Rejoice over Liberation of Yenan". . . . His face was ashen, and he could not utter a sound, as Mao Jen-feng pushed the paper under his nose.

Smouldering with fury, Mao Jen-feng said: ". . . the Bureau has only just sent a report to the Generalissimo, and now *Forward* has reappeared!"

"This is a different issue. It is printed . . ." said Hsu Peng-fei looking at the copy.

"Yes, that's just the problem. As soon as we smash the du-

plicated one, a printed one crops up. I give you three days to wind up this case!"

Panic-stricken, Hsu Peng-fei stared at his superior, not daring to utter a word.

"The Communists are inciting the workers everywhere in the city to go out on strike, did you know that?" challenged Mao Jen-feng.

Hsu Peng-fei cringed. "Where did you get that information from, sir?"

"Where are your eyes! The Communists are scattering leaflets everywhere and workers are resisting our suppression of riots. I knew about it this afternoon! You nincompoops!"

"But — but that's impossible. The Communist Party's secretary for the workers' movement is in our hands!"

"Mobs of workers at the arms factories are demanding that those arrested be released. Did you know that, eh?"

"Y — yes, I knew that," Hsu Peng-fei admitted grudgingly. "But I've already given the order to suppress. . . ."

As if in answer to Hsu Peng-fei's words, a distant steam-siren began to wail. The lights suddenly dimmed, then went out altogether, the room was plunged into darkness. . . .

Mrs. Hsu could be heard calling in flustered tones:

"Orderly, bring some candles! Hurry!"

"That's a power cut," said Hsu Peng-fei forcing himself to sound calm. "They happen quite frequently in Chungking."

"Nonsense!" roared Mao Jen-feng. "Are you deaf? How many times have I told you that the Communist delegation has been active in Chungking for many years. Things are not as simple as you think. Listen to that siren! Tomorrow is the first of May, the workers are going on strike again!"

They sat in the darkness listening to the shriek of the siren. Suddenly a blast came from another steam-whistle nearby . . . another, and still another. . . . More and more joined in the swelling chorus. They seemed to be calling and responding to each other, supporting each other. Soon the Chungking night

was filled with a rising, rushing crescendo of blasts from the sirens. . . .

Shen Yang-chai burst into the room and said in nervous haste: "The Advisory Department has just called up. The Special Adviser's car will be here at any moment."

With an exclamation of futility, Mao Jen-feng told Hsu Peng-fei to go and welcome the guest. He then asked Shen Yang-chai what the Special Adviser had said just then.

"Well, the gist of it was that we must find the underground Party organization." Shen Yang-chai groped his way through the dark towards Mao Jen-feng, and almost in a whisper said: "His idea is to squeeze fat out of human bones! We have Communist hostages to serve as material."

"Squeeze fat — out of human bones?" Mao Jen-feng lingered over the words. After a moment's reflection he rapped out:

"Quite so, I have all those political prisoners in the concentration camps to work on. They can supply a lot of information! Instruct the concentration camps to tighten up on their inmates at once! Set them a time limit for making the political prisoners talk!"

Mao Jen-feng abruptly stood up, and, as if to impress his meaning on Shen Yang-chai, reiterated:

"All of them, including Hsu Yun-feng, are hostages as well as human encyclopaedias!" He rapped his palm with his fist and went on: "They are under my thumb, and once I start putting on the pressure, I'll get them all cornered. Then, when those Communists are at their last gasp, I'll find the human encyclopaedias among them and get everything I want out of them! Isn't this a marvellous idea of the Special Adviser's?"

"Does Hsu Peng-fei know about this?" he abruptly asked Shen Yang-chai.

"He went last night to the residence of the Special Adviser at Plum Garden," Shen Yang-chai reported, "the Special Adviser's suggestion may be Hsu Peng-fei's idea."

"Oh!" was Mao Jen-feng's only comment, and the expression on his face could not be seen in the dark. After a long pause,

he said: "The key man is still Hsu Yun-feng. It looks as if I shall have to take a personal hand in this matter. . . ."

Outside, a car honked several times announcing the Special Adviser's arrival. Excited murmurs rose from the guests, and Mrs. Hsu's voice could be heard demanding in fretful tones: "Why isn't that light here? Orderly, bring some candles!"

The table in the resplendent dining-room was spread with a spotless white tablecloth and laid with silverware and glasses. The empty room seemed to be waiting for the arrival of eminent guests.

The hosts were gathered in the adjoining lounge. Hsu Peng-fei put down the telephone receiver, lit a cigarette and walked with affected leisure to the window, where he watched the goldfish swimming lazily among the water-plants in the aquarium. The elderly Shen Yang-chai sprawled on the sofa, several American magazines open beside him. Chu Chieh kept coming in and out. A record-player sent a soft tremolo through the room.

A car hooted outside.

A stout, bald-headed man in a white serge suit climbed out of the car and waddled towards the door. He was followed by a woman, carrying a camera and flashlight apparatus. Tossing back her hair which had been bleached blonde she smiled at those assembled to welcome the new arrival.

Hsu Peng-fei went out to meet them. He shook hands with the fat man, and Shen Yang-chai took the blonde's camera. Hsu Peng-fei put his arm around her slender waist as he asked the fat man:

"How's the news story coming along?"

"I spent the whole morning on it!" said the fat man with unconcealed self-satisfaction. "It will be released first thing tomorrow. All the newspaper offices in the city have been told to carry it as the leading front-page story. It is captioned 'Leading Member of Communist Underground Enthusiastically Co-operates with Government!' You see, once we add a

photograph of this banquet with him clinking glasses and smiling, no one will see any gaps in the story." With a nod to the blonde he added: "Mary, we rely on your skill as a photographer for a good picture."

"Don't worry! I've seen the pictures she has taken of the Special Adviser," said Shen Yang-chai as he stuck up his thumb in the American O.K. gesture. "Every one of them is *ting hao*, one hundred per cent Hollywood style."

The blonde smiled: "Oh, Shen Yang-chai, what a flatterer you are!"

Everyone burst into loud laughter. When it died down, Shen Yang-chai turned to Hsu Peng-fei. "What about a rehearsal just to make sure there won't be any mistakes?"

"Fine, fine! Please do the honours!" Hsu Peng-fei went into the lounge with the fat man.

Shen Yang-chai turned around and patted Chu Chieh on the shoulder. "You take charge of the rehearsal!"

Chu Chieh was about to reply when the heavily-perfumed blonde squeezed in between them. "Shen Yang-chai, would you like me to join you?" she asked.

Shen Yang-chai squeezed her hand and smiled: "Why, of course."

The ceiling-fan in the dining-room began to whirl and the coloured lamps on the walls diffused a mellow glow.

Chu Chieh cleared his throat and waited for the others to quieten down. All of them were secret agents from the Second Department and Special District Headquarters who had been ordered to attend. "Today's banquet," he began, "is to welcome an important person from the Communist Party. . . . The Chief's orders are, firstly. . . ."

After Chu Chieh had given his instructions, Shen Yang-chai said:

"When the guest arrives, everyone is to get up and clap. Now do as I say. . . ." Everyone stood up and turned towards the door with a welcoming smile.

At this very moment, Hsu Peng-fei and the fat man came out of the lounge. Shen Yang-chai hurried over to them. He knew that the guest of honour was about to arrive. The secret agents hurriedly dispersed while the blonde ran to the door.

An Austin drew up, and out stepped two guards with guns in their hands, escorting a simply-dressed man.

Hsu Peng-fei greeted him cordially: "Ah, Mr. Hsu! You have had to put up with some inconveniences during these last few days. I'm afraid we have not been very polite to you."

He then introduced the hosts one by one. Smiling obsequiously, Chu Chieh motioned the visitor in.

The blonde boldly stepped forward and introduced herself: "I am Mary, special correspondent of the Central News Agency. . . ."

The fat man smiled and bobbed his head. "I am head of the Information Department of the Southwest Bureau. On behalf of General Chu Shao-liang, I would like to express. . . ."

Shen Yang-chai suavely broke in: "Ah, Mr. Hsu, I hear that you are soon to be released. Congratulations!"

Hsu Yun-feng did not answer. Apart from Hsu Peng-fei, he had never met any of the people before, and he sensed treachery behind all this bowing and scraping.

He smiled coldly and walked calmly into the lobby amidst polite handclapping.

Hsu Peng-fei glanced around, cleared his throat, and said courteously:

"We are extremely happy to tell you, Mr. Hsu, that Nanking has sent us a telegram ordering your release."

This was the second reference to his release that Hsu Yun-feng had heard since his arrival. He saw what they were up to. It fitted in with the "preferential treatment" he had been given the last few days. Their motives had not changed since the interrogation. They had seen that threats were of no avail, and had now switched to tactics of blandishments and temptation. Hsu Yun-feng was not worried, and in a disinterested manner said:

"So be it. However, it's for you, not me, to say whether I get my freedom or not. I must say though, it's very strange indeed for the hosts at a banquet to be so frightened of their guest that they bring him in under armed escort!"

Hsu Peng-fei nodded, seemingly agreeing with Hsu Yun-feng. This gave the latter an insight into the working of his mind. Evidently Hsu Peng-fei felt that losing his temper would not help matters and would only hinder the realization of his plans, so he had to put up with Hsu Yun-feng's unpleasant remarks. This, however, would make the situation even more difficult for Hsu Peng-fei to handle, and would cause him more headaches than their previous encounter during the interrogation. . . .

There was another round of applause. Hsu Peng-fei stood up and immediately started to talk.

"Allow me to introduce our guest. This is Mr. Hsu Yun-feng, a — er — responsible cadre of the Communist Party's Municipal Committee and their secretary for the workers' movement. China can never have enough men like him. To celebrate Mr. Hsu's release and to welcome him to this banquet, let us — er. . . ."

Everyone's eyes were fixed on the impassive Hsu Yun-feng, ready to applaud.

The blonde took her camera from the head of the Information Department, who had just put in a flashbulb for her. She walked across to take the picture.

Hsu Yun-feng calmly eyed his smirking "guests," then, placing his hands on the table, said quietly:

"Our host's introduction seems to imply that I am to make a speech. Very well, I'll say a few words." His gaze once more went around the silent guests. All were nervously watching the mysterious and formidable "guest of honour."

"This banquet reminds me of another incident. Once when I was a worker the factory manager insisted on inviting me to dinner. He arranged a really first-rate meal, just as you have done now. Why did the manager so honour a poor worker like

myself? Because I was the workers' representative. The manager hoped to plug my mouth with rich food! I looked at the food and drink and shook my head. I said it was too little. The manager was knocked backwards. Then I explained that the meal might stop one worker's mouth, but it would certainly not plug the mouths of all the factory workers!"

"Mr. Hsu!" The head of the Information Department seated beside Hsu Peng-fei lurched to his feet and tried to interfere. "Your speech is going too far from the subject. This is an official banquet given by the Southwest Bureau."

"Too far from the subject? Then what is the subject? What is your motive in giving this banquet?" Hsu Yun-feng's face darkened, as he said: "If you don't want me to talk that's easily done — you have guns! But if I am to speak, then I will say what I want to."

Hsu Peng-fei was taken aback, but he jumped to his feet, and with a placating smile said: "Mr. Hsu, say whatever you please! What the information chief meant to say was that the Southwest Bureau has especially arranged this meal in your honour. . . ."

"All right then, listen!" continued Hsu Yun-feng. "If the factory manager's food and wine could not plug up the workers' mouths, what purpose will today's banquet serve? You are only inviting me because I'm a member of the Communist Party and a responsible cadre of the underground Party organization, and, as such, enjoy great prestige among the workers — a prestige of which you are afraid! But think! If I eat at the same table with universally-detested secret agents, I will lose my standing among the masses and be of no use to you. So aren't you stupidly wasting your money and defeating your own ends?" With a short laugh Hsu Yun-feng asked: "Who is the director of this comedy? Don't you think he is the biggest fool on earth? He is haunted by the ticklish question of whether or not he should have invited Hsu Yun-feng to dinner. In my opinion, he is probably still not clear about the answer!"

"There, there, Mr. Hsu," said Hsu Peng-fei trying to sound

understanding and sympathetic. The flustered guests looked on, as he proposed: "Mr. Hsu, what do you say to eating while we talk?"

Hsu Yun-feng sat down. With a wave of his hand he said: "I've put the question. Any of you may answer it. I shan't restrict your right to speak. What's the hurry, General Hsu? We have plenty of time."

Hsu Yun-feng's eyes swept the tongue-tied agents, and not one of them dared answer. During the painful silence that followed, Hsu Yun-feng noticed Hsu Peng-fei whispering to Shen Yang-chai, who stole out of the room into the lounge. Hsu Peng-fei's worried expression and furtive action reminded Hsu Yun-feng of an incompetent actor urgently imploring assistance from his director off-stage. Hsu Yun-feng sat still, saying nothing and looking straight in front of him. He ignored his adversaries. In the strained silence no one even cleared his throat. After a while Shen Yang-chai came hurrying back from the lounge and whispered into Hsu Peng-fei's ear. The latter nodded and his frown eased a little. Hsu Yun-feng gathered from this that the behind-the-scenes director of the banquet would soon be making a personal appearance.

Hsu Yun-feng became aware of a conversation being carried on in whispers. The blonde got up to fill the wine glasses, and the room gradually livened up with laughter and conversation. Hsu Yun-feng sat impassively, waiting for the comedy to develop.

From the loudspeaker came the latest popular tunes.

Hsu Peng-fei raised his glass. The blonde hastily set a glass of wine before Hsu Yun-feng, then she sighted the camera, ready to take a picture for the next day's leading story.

Hsu Yun-feng continued to sit impassively and Hsu Peng-fei had to lower his glass again. He picked up his chopsticks and Shen Yang-chai followed his example, saying:

"Please help yourself. These dishes have been prepared by the most famous chef in Chungking. They're delicious."

Hsu Yun-feng noticed the Information Chief and Hsu Peng-

fei winking at Chu Chieh, who then pushed one of the best dishes towards him. The blonde once more got her camera ready and Hsu Peng-fei stood up again and raised his own glass while setting another beside Hsu Yun-feng. If Hsu Yun-feng would only pick it up, he would immediately clink glasses with him, the flashbulb would go off and tomorrow's leading news-picture would be in the bag! Hsu Peng-fei would then be able to use the photograph to fabricate lies, and as proof that Hsu Yun-feng was already "enthusiastically" co-operating with the Kuomintang. This would serve to hoodwink the public, slander the Communist Party and compel Hsu Yun-feng to submit to his dictates.

But Hsu Yun-feng ignored the glass of wine. He had seen through the tricks of his adversaries without much mental effort. Waving away the obnoxious photographer, he suddenly stood up saying:

"Stop all this nonsense! You want me to drink a toast? You want me to clink glasses with you? You want to take a photograph of me? It would be much more effective to bring in your armed guards. Don't think you'll ever be able to drink with a Communist!"

As the guests stared at him in dismay, Hsu Yun-feng pointed at the delicacies on the table: "Where does all this food and drink come from? Tell me, where does it come from? Eh? This is the blood and tears you have wrung from the people! We Communists could never stoop as low as you Kuomintangers who stuff your dirty guts with the blood and tears of the people. If you want to drink toasts, drink them among yourselves!"

Hsu Yun-feng pushed back his chair, strode to the centre of the room and commanded: "Send me back to prison!"

Shen Yang-chai who had been silent all this time, hurriedly stood up and blocked Hsu Yun-feng's path. "It's up to you whether you want to drink a toast, but it's up to us whether we allow you to leave! Let's go and sit in the lounge!" He

said this threateningly, and with the desperation of one who refuses to admit defeat.

Several burly men surrounded Hsu Yun-feng, who chuckled: "So you've exhausted your bag of tricks. It's about time you called out your boss from backstage!"

Hsu Peng-fei hurriedly intervened to prevent the situation from breaking out into open violence. Waving back Shen Yang-chai and his blundering subordinates, he called for some tea. Then with a forced smile, he invited Hsu Yun-feng into the next room.

Hsu Yun-feng shook his sleeves contemptuously and walked calmly into the lounge. Being brought at pistol point to a banquet, or even to be taken to the execution ground could not intimidate him. So what was there to be afraid of in a small lounge? He sat down in an armchair, ignoring the secret agents who had come in with him.

There was a burst of handclapping and a hubbub of voices in the dining-room followed by a hushed silence, and Hsu Peng-fei hurried out with all the other leading secret agents. Hsu Yun-feng couldn't have been more indifferent to what was happening as he sat there watching the pretty goldfish in an aquarium.

Approaching footsteps broke the silence. Hsu Yun-feng knew that the backstage director was about to put in his appearance. A man in full military uniform stepped from behind the screen at the entrance to the lounge. Hsu Yun-feng appraised his new adversary: excessive self-conceit made the man push his chest forward out of all proportion to his short, fat frame. He had to hold his back stiff to give even a modicum of military dignity to his stomach, otherwise he would have appeared too much of a nobody beside the sturdy Hsu Peng-fei.

"I hear that you've just made a very inappropriate speech, so I've decided to talk to you personally." His beady eyes watched Hsu Yun-feng with a peculiar malignity.

Hsu Yun-feng returned the gaze.

"Mr. Hsu," said Hsu Peng-fei, "let me introduce you. This is the Director of our Bureau."

So this was Mao Jen-feng, the head of the MIB and Director of the Bureau of Confidential Information of the Ministry of Defence! Hsu Yun-feng took a good look at his insignificant adversary. His shining black knee-length boots had special built-up heels to increase his height. Hsu Yun-feng had seen such people before who relied on out-thrust chests and the thickness of their heels to give themselves "distinction."

"The Director has come from Nanking especially to talk to you."

"I have met many Communists," said Mao Jen-feng in a harsh tone. "As for position, Chang Kuo-tao* wasn't inferior, was he? As for learning and ability, Yeh Ching* wasn't lacking, was he? But unlike them you are very unwise on certain matters."

Mao Jen-feng drew himself up stiffly. "According to the regulations of the Communist Party, your Party membership was forfeited on the day of your arrest. Now you are no longer a Communist Party member and the Communist Party no longer needs you to uphold its interests! Your relations with us are not those of members of two political parties, but those between the state and an individual. That the individual should obey the government in no way violates the so-called democratic centralism which you people hold sacred."

Mao Jen-feng clasped his hands behind his back and puffed up his chest like a belligerent rooster, trying to assert his boundless arrogance and power.

Hsu Yun-feng looked down at his adversary and said dispassionately: "The relations between us? They are those between a revolutionary and a counter-revolutionary engaged in a life-and-death struggle!"

Mao Jen-feng stepped forward, gesticulating with his pudgy arm: "You people can talk of nothing but the class struggle

* Renegades from communism.

and armed uprising! Your Marxist-Leninist teachings on the class struggle became obsolete long ago. How many years is it since Marx died? How long ago did Lenin die?"

"Stalin is still alive," interrupted Hsu Yun-feng. "Stalin is carrying forward the cause of Marx and Lenin and has built up the first socialist state in the world. You people may well tremble at the mention of his name!"

"Mr. Hsu, you speak very well!" Mao Jen-feng's short pudgy neck swayed lightly. Then, with a significant twist in his voice, he continued: "But now, let me ask you: aside from Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin, who else do you have?"

"Mao Tsetung!" Pointing at Mao Jen-feng, who gave a start and stepped back, he went on in a loud voice: "He has combined the general truth of Marxism-Leninism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution, greatly enriched Marxism-Leninism and made its influence more keenly felt throughout the world. Marxism-Leninism will never become out-of-date. Armed with Marxism-Leninism and Mao Tsetung Thought, the invincible Chinese people and the Communist Party will wipe out all reactionaries, including your pack of Yankee-nurtured secret agents!"

"What's that?" Mao Jen-feng's eyes gleamed fiercely.

Hsu Yun-feng struck back, not yielding an inch. "I say that Marxism-Leninism will wipe out all the reactionaries in the world!"

"Mr. Hsu!" Hsu Peng-fei hurriedly intervened, trying to protect Mao Jen-feng in this angry exchange of words.

The revolutionary and the counter-revolutionary continued to stare at each other, neither giving way by as much as the flicker of an eyelash. There was a tense, explosive atmosphere in the little lounge.

Mao Jen-feng turned around as suddenly as he had stepped forward and walked back a few steps. With consummate ease he changed the tone of his voice and said nonchalantly: "It is understandable that many years of enmity have left a profound psychological effect. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei nodded in agreement. Mao Jen-feng spun around again to stare at his invulnerable adversary. Neither spoke. The heavy silence was like the calm before a storm.

"Hsu Peng-fei, leave the room!" Mao Jen-feng waited till he had left, then shut the door. Hsu Yun-feng and Mao Jen-feng were now alone.

With a haughty smile Mao Jen-feng walked slowly towards the armchair, and motioned to Hsu Yun-feng to be seated. He sat down opposite, and leaning slightly forward with an air of warmth and sincerity, said: "We'll talk in private. Have some tea, Mr. Hsu. Your behaviour has been most. . . ."

"Most unsatisfactory?"

Mao Jen-feng glanced at Hsu Yun-feng but did not answer.

Hsu Yun-feng swung one leg over the other and sat composedly with his hands clasped around his knee. He was waiting to see how the chief of the secret agents would lead off.

"We are extremely happy to have you here." Mao Jen-feng was now all cordiality, as if his recent performance had never taken place. "We attach the greatest importance to such highly-placed cadres as yourself. Frankly, we very much need people like you, and would like to enlist your. . . . May I finish speaking before we exchange views, Mr. Hsu?"

Hsu Yun-feng allowed him to continue.

"The developments at the front are very unfavourable to us, much worse than anything we expected. It is also a fact that our rear areas are unstable. To put it simply, you people have been gradually gaining the upper hand in recent years. You are no doubt aware that Chinese history records many instances of the country being split between the North and the South into two opposing states. Of course if such a situation should arise now, it would only be a temporary one. As your ultimate aim is to drive us from power, we can never give in and we shall eventually annihilate you with the help of American aid. In my estimation such a split between North and South is inevitable. But regardless of the turn of events,

the Southwest is our rear and we will never abandon it. It is because of our future developments that we hope to enlist your services. I am sure, Mr. Hsu, that you grasp my meaning."

Hsu Yun-feng smiled coldly and allowed his adversary to continue.

"I am a secret serviceman and I have no taste for political terminology. We intend to enlist your service to stabilize the situation in the Southwest, and to set an example of co-operation between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party here in Chungking. Friendly and peaceful co-operation will bring more happiness to the nation than strife and bloodshed, and will be beneficial both to the state and to your personal interests. This is a cause we should both promote. You are welcome to state your conditions, Mr. Hsu. Once we have your promise to co-operate, we can easily meet your terms, as this type of co-operation will be a precedent as well as an experiment of great political value."

"I have no conditions," Hsu Yun-feng wasted no words. "I will never betray the revolution by doing political horse-trading with you."

"I expected that you would answer like this," said Mao Jen-feng. Then pretending to open his heart to Hsu Yun-feng, he went on: "I am putting myself in your position. There are three courses open to you. The first — the one I just mentioned — is the best. We can allow you some time to think it over. I don't doubt that a veteran Communist Party member like yourself finds it difficult and painful to alter his political stand. Yet it is not impossible, and it is on this premise that we rest our hopes on you. We have considered another course, less desirable, but also worth your serious consideration. We will guarantee your safety and your livelihood in return for confidential information about certain sections of your organization. You might, for instance, give us a list of the principal Communists in the Yangtze Ordnance Works. This could not be considered changing sides or betraying secrets, and your political prestige would in no way be impaired, as we guarantee

to treat the matter as absolutely confidential. If, at some time now or in the future, you want to get out of the political struggle, we can send you to some safe place such as Hongkong or Macao. . . ."

"I would like to hear about the third course you have in mind."

"The third course? I don't think I have to mention that, because it is not our wish, and it is impossible that we shall fail to get anything out of you."

"I disagree. You'll get nothing from me."

Mao Jen-feng smiled. "This is a complicated struggle and we are resolved to wait until you take the path we have prepared for you."

"I can only say this about your hopes," said Hsu Yun-feng, also smiling, "they are wishful thinking — the crazy illusions of a counter-revolutionary."

"Eh?" Mao Jen-feng smiled wryly. "You lack a realistic approach. What I've been talking about is not illusion, but reality, one hundred per cent reality. Whatever your attitude now, you are bound to end up by accepting our offer. You'll have to submit!"

Hsu Yun-feng laughed out loud. "Although you have been fighting us many years, you are the ones who can't learn to think realistically."

Mao Jen-feng also laughed, but then said slowly:

"Tomorrow the newspapers will publish the following news item: Responsible member of Communist Underground cooperates enthusiastically with the government. The papers will carry a statement from Hsu Yun-feng to all Communists and workers. . . . With your prestige, I am confident that it will create mental turmoil among Chungking's underground Communists and the workers.... I even fear that things will take such a turn that we shall lack sufficient official positions to reward the Communists who come over to our side! I am sure that Fu Chih-kao is not the only one of his kind!"

"I'm afraid that if you enact such a farce, you will be making great fools of yourselves," replied Hsu Yun-feng. "It is a pity that you haven't even managed to obtain a photograph of me drinking with you. Who believes your newspapers? They are only good for deceiving yourselves. Was all this your idea? If so, it was truly a most stupid, third-rate plan."

Mao Jen-feng's smile vanished. Glaring at Hsu Yun-feng, he ground out word by word:

"Of course the news item won't be enough by itself. As Director Hsu has already told you, we are considering releasing you!"

"Splendid," said Hsu Yun-feng. "If you dare to release me, I shall leave immediately." He rose and walked calmly towards the closed door.

"No, no!" Mao Jen-feng instantly barred the way, fearing that Hsu Yun-feng might disappear, never to be found again. He forgot himself and shouted: "We cannot let you go!"

Hsu Yun-feng smiled mockingly, and Mao Jen-feng realized that his failure had made him panic. He sat down again on the sofa and said angrily: "We will release you! We'll send you at once to the Yangtze Ordnance Works, hold a welcome meeting, put up public notices and let the workers see you standing side by side with us."

"Do as you please. But if you don't stop me talking, I'll tell the workers the truth. So I warn you, you'd better gag me before taking me in front of them. That, of course, would turn my 'release' into a ludicrous joke. What a shame!"

Hsu Yun-feng turned around and walked slowly towards the aquarium. He had no desire to waste any more breath on his contemptible adversary who had exhausted all his devices.

11

SCORCHING sunlight beat down on the barred door. The narrow cell was like an oven and the stench of perspiration was overpowering. There was not a breath of wind. Through the window could be heard the sound of suppressed groans and of laboured breathing.

Trying not to think of his thirst, Liu Sze-yang peered in the direction of a cicada monotonously chirping in some parched trees nearby. His eyes wandered over the cordon of guard towers built around the prison building. Outside the high wall a few leafless bamboos could be seen. There was not a speck of green anywhere.

The distant drought-stricken hills looked as if they had been ravaged by fire. The withered yellow grass on their arid slopes quivered in the heat. Liu Sze-yang's weary gaze came back to the prison yard.

On the high wall surmounted with electrified barbed wire was written with stiff precision:

> The best years of your life never return!
> Think carefully . . . !
> Consider the time and the place,
> Be sensible . . . !

On another wall was written in old-fashioned letters:

> The path of error leads to perdition,
> Repent and salvation is yours!
> Accept your lot patiently,
> Do not grumble, do not complain!

On the top of the wall, machine-guns and bayonets glinted in the sunshine. . . .

Liu Sze-yang recalled the covered prison van, which had

brought him along a bumpy road this morning to this secret concentration camp.

The details of his arrest more than a month ago were still clearly etched in his mind. Sun Ming-hsia, his fiancée, had come from Chungking University to his home that evening. Late at night, they had listened with bated breath to the broadcast from the liberated areas coming through enemy jamming. Word by word and sentence by sentence they had both copied down the stirring news of victory. He had checked, and carefully rewritten the notes, intending to hand the good copy to Comrade Li Ching-yuan the next day for publication as a main item in *Forward*. When he had finished the work, Sun Ming-hsia lifted the small aluminum pan from the hot plate and poured out two glasses of boiling milk before burning the two sets of rough notes. Happy and excited, they had sat before the window, looking out at the star-studded sky and sharing their simple snack. Their watches showed that it was nearly five in the morning; in another two hours a new day of struggle would begin. Sun Ming-hsia had shown no signs of weariness, and had been telling him quietly about recent developments at the university; how she had taken over some of Hua Wei's work after his departure, how she and Cheng Yao were good friends and liked working together. . . .

In the midst of this intimate conversation, footsteps came pounding up the staircase. Startled, Liu Sze-yang had immediately thrust the copy prepared for *Forward* into a secret hiding-place in the desk. . . . Thus he and his fiancée had been arrested, suddenly and without the slightest forewarning.

He did not find out that he had been betrayed by Fu Chih-kao until he was cross-examined. Fortunately, this traitor did not know that he was monitoring broadcasts for *Forward* so the enemy had not questioned him about that. Liu Sze-yang resolved never to let this secret pass his lips.

He recalled how he had fallen into an argument with the chief of the secret agents — the one with the golden plum-blossom insignia on his epaulets. . . .

The agent had sat on his upholstered swivel-chair toying with an American-made cigarette lighter. . . . Now and then he had watched Liu Sze-yang with narrowed eyes, observing his expression. His first words had expressed ridicule and unconcealed displeasure.

"So the third son of a bourgeois family has become a Communist? Your family can give you all the food, clothes and pleasures you want, why do you want to get mixed up in politics?"

And how had he answered? He had just raised his head haughtily and looked him up and down.

"The Communist Party's strategy is to use the scions of distinguished families as propaganda tools to expand their influence," the agent had continued. "There is nothing new or strange about young people being dissatisfied with life, and being made use of by others in their naiveté and ignorance. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang had never heard anything so ridiculous. He certainly could not allow the Party or himself to suffer such an insult! "Who is using me? No one can make use of me!" he had exclaimed. "I have a right to believe in communism!"

"Beliefs? Principles? Just so many words! The Communists talk about classes. What class do you belong to? Your brother used to be an official, and then became a dealer of Szechuan medicinal herbs, owning shops in Chungking and Shanghai. With so much property, what are you if not one of the bourgeoisie? Isn't your class origin, ideology and conduct the target of the Communist Party's rectification campaigns? I know what I am talking about. I have studied many Communist Party documents. What will happen if the Communists take over? Will the Liu family be able to hold on to its possessions? As a Party member of alien class origin, won't you be unceremoniously kicked out of the Party? There have been various kinds of doctrines from ancient times onwards, but the realists have been the ones who've succeeded. I would advise you to study carefully the *Three People's Principles* of our party. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang still did not know why this secret agent had talked to him like that, or why he had not been tortured like his other comrades. The reason however was not only because his family had presented gold bars as bribes. It was also something more important: Hsu Peng-fei could not understand or believe that an educated man from such a well-to-do family could become a real Communist. He had therefore employed different tactics in dealing with him and had decided to try to win him over. But of course Liu Sze-yang did not know this. He was only conscious that he had no class feelings in common with his enemy.

"Class origin does not decide everything," he had said. "I studied the *Three People's Principles* long ago, as well as many other bourgeois theories, but I finally arrived at the conviction that Marxism-Leninism is the only truth."

"And why should Marxism-Leninism be the only truth?" the secret agent had asked with interest.

"At the university I studied various teachings on political economy. I found this truth in materialist philosophy, in *Capital* and the laws of development of human society. The proletariat is the only revolutionary class with a future. Only that class can bring mankind complete emancipation and universal brotherhood!"

"That's enough about your materialist philosophy! Do you or don't you want to be released?" The secret agent's voice had been tinged with disappointment. "You are not an ignorant labourer. My demands of you are very simple. I don't have to cross-examine you, since your underground organization has already been smashed! You were involved in the students' movement in the Shatse district, weren't you? Everything about you and your fiancée has been told us by Fu Chih-kao who also is a Communist, isn't he? He's been a Party member much longer than you! But he is a man who knows where his interests lie. He is wiser than you."

"You want me to become a traitor? Never!"

"Eh? You're asking for trouble. However, I agree to let

you go if you will write a statement expressing your repentance and determination to turn over a new leaf."

"I could not sink that low."

"Eh! Third son of a rich family! There are two roads before you. One is to write that statement to be published in the papers and go free. The other is long-term imprisonment and self-destruction."

Liu Sze-yang had rejected these threats without a second's hesitation. This had brought an exclamation of disappointment from his enemy:

"Do you want to spend the rest of your life in prison?"

"No, I'll only stay there until the day of your doom!"

"All right then, I'd like to see how long the soft son of a rich man can hold out! Mark my words, before three months are up, I'll have you begging me for a chance to turn over a new leaf!"

"Beg you? Never!"

This had ended the enemy's attempts to entice him and he had been shut in a dark, damp cell. The next time he had been taken out was in the middle of the night. He had been led across a lawn where he thought he saw a tree and something that looked like flower beds. He and several others had entered a dark passage. There had been a loud command: "Take aim!" He remembered thinking that he would have liked to have a last look at the world, but everything was pitch-black and he could see nothing. He and some others had shouted slogans in the dark. . . . Then the rifles had fired, the deafening crash reverberating along the passageway.

But no bullets had pierced his chest; it had merely been a sham execution, which failed to achieve its purpose. When he had been returned to his cell, he was no longer alone. Locked in the same cell with him was Yu Hsin-chiang, a young worker who had also been betrayed by Fu Chih-kao. The two had become close companions, supporting and encouraging each other. This morning, the prison van had brought him

and the severely tortured Yu Hsin-chiang to this secret concentration camp.

He had not seen Sun Ming-hsia since their arrest, but he had heard her shouting slogans on the night of the sham executions. Where was she now? Perhaps she too had been brought to this concentration camp.

Liu Sze-yang thrust his head through the hole of the cell door. The blazing sunshine made his eyes smart. Trying to ignore the suffocating heat and the dryness in his throat, he inspected the surroundings. There were rows of cells on both sides. He remembered that he and Yu Hsin-chiang had been shut in Cell 7 upstairs where about twenty people were crowded into a space about ten paces long and seven wide. Most of them had obviously been there for a long time already. He wondered if among them there were any of his comrades or a Party group.

The ground floor evidently contained a similar row of cells, but the heavy iron padlocks which fastened on the doors split the concentration camp into countless sealed cubicles and prevented him from looking downstairs or from seeing the other inmates. Peering between the rails, he could only catch a glimpse of the prison yard — a narrow enclosure where the prisoners took their daily stroll.

The sun-baked yard was empty. . . .

Liu Sze-yang remained very much aloof in his new surroundings. He preferred to observe and gradually get acquainted with conditions, rather than be too quick in approaching strangers. He felt lonely, although he was among many comrades-in-arms. He did not know why he felt like that. Did the need for precaution set him apart, or was it the solitary nature of an intellectual?

As the sun gradually sank in the west its rays coming through the window made the stuffy cell hotter than ever.

Armed guards stood in the watch towers outside the high wall and its electrified fence and the nearby hills were patrolled by secret agents with dogs.

The bare mountain range cut off the view. He was tortured by waves of almost unendurable agony; his throat was burning and his saliva had dried up. Hsu Peng-fei's sneering voice echoed in his ears: "You'll be begging for a chance. . . ." Beg the enemy for an opportunity to turn over a new leaf? Liu Sze-yang bit his lips angrily. "I must stand up under the test. Never will I betray the Party!" he vowed to himself.

Turning around, he looked at the small rusty pail which held the drinking water for the whole cell. There was not much left, but no one touched it. Everyone wanted to keep it for those most in need of it. Liu Sze-yang made an effort to control his craving for water, and he decided not to look at the little pail again.

His feelings calmed a little, he managed to secrete a little saliva to ease his parched throat. He turned to look again at the women's cells opposite. The words of Gorky's famous *Prisoner's Song* came to his mind. He started to recite it softly, as if to express his own steadfast purpose despite the enemy's brutality.

The sun rises and sets,
But the prison is forever dark.
Day and night, the jailor stands at the window.
Watch if you want!
I cannot escape,
Though born to love freedom,
I cannot break these heavy chains!

He heard the silvery voice of a girl singing in the distance as if in answer. His heart leapt. It was her! His eyes were drawn to the women's cells opposite. There, at the grating of one of the cells, he saw those big, shining eyes which he hadn't seen for so many days! His fiancée Sun Ming-hsia's voice was filled with a passionate ardour and she seemed to be speaking directly to him.

He is a young man so faithful and true,
One worthy of the heart of a girl.
They say he is poor,
But is love to be bought with gold?

They call him a criminal.
But why is he wearing a prisoner's chains?

Sun Ming-hsia was gazing at him and he noticed that she had a bright red bow in her hair. A heavy load seemed to drop from him. There was great solace and comfort in the thought that they were fighting together and sharing joy and sorrow.

"Water! . . . Water!" came a low groan from behind him. Yu Hsin-chiang was coming round again. Liu Sze-yang tore his eyes away from his fiancée and hurried over to Yu Hsin-chiang who was lying on the floor, soaked in sweat. He had torn open his shirt, and Liu Sze-yang saw festering wounds in flesh charred by red-hot irons! From his cracked lips came the one word:

"Water! . . . Water!"

Liu Sze-yang looked at the small water-pail in the corner. He walked over and picked it up. It was pitifully light, very little water was left. Troubled, Liu Sze-yang looked around the small cell. It was as stifling as a hot iron box, but the men packed into it were bearing their thirst stoically. No one touched the pail, each wanting to leave those last precious drops for some other comrade. Liu Sze-yang stood undecided for quite a time before pouring a little into his bowl. Then seeing Yu Hsin-chiang's fever-flushed face, he hesitantly trickled out a few more drops.

A man with swollen, purplish-black legs was sitting silently in the corner of the room, his chin in his hands and an empty clay pipe clenched between his teeth. He now struggled painfully to his feet and took the pail out of Liu Sze-yang's hands.

"He's just been tortured and he's running a fever. Give it to him! It's all right!"

He tipped all the precious liquid in the pail into Liu Sze-yang's bowl. Then he tossed the pail back into the corner, saying:

"A tiny thing like that wouldn't hold much."

Holding his half-filled bowl, Liu Sze-yang looked gratefully at this blunt, plain-spoken man, who looked like a peasant. His teeth, yellowed from smoking, were streaked with blood.

"Your mouth is bleeding!" he exclaimed.

The man shook his head and said calmly: "That's my gums. They're rotting, so are my hands and feet. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang frowned. "That's scurvy; it comes from lack of fresh food."

"It wasn't like this back in the village. We've got all sorts of greens at home, and you don't get all these funny sicknesses. Look, I haven't even got anything to smoke!"

As he spoke, the man gently lifted Yu Hsin-chiang's perspiring head to give him a drink. As soon as the sufferer felt the water on his lips, he opened his mouth and his hands clawed at his heaving chest as he struggled for air.

Liu Sze-yang and the older man looked at each other. If only they could have some more water! But the bucket was empty, and no words passed their lips. Liu Sze-yang picked up his jacket and held it over Yu Hsin-chiang to protect him from the burning sun which glared through the gratings of the door. His companion handed him a tattered fan made of scraps of paper pasted together. Liu Sze-yang laid down his jacket and fanned Yu Hsin-chiang, sending gusts of hot, putrid air over him.

"Are you from the countryside?" Liu Sze-yang asked the older man, staring at his clay pipe. Its bowl was shiny from handling but showed no signs of ever having held any tobacco.

"Yes, I'm a country bumpkin. My name's Ting Chang-fa. I'm from Hsinching County in western Szechuan. The land down there is as good as it comes but there are a sight too many landlords and thugs."

"My name is Liu Sze-yang."

"So I've heard. And he's called Yu Hsin-chiang," Ting Chang-fa continued. "You're both from Chungking, aren't you? The first few days in Chatzetung concentration camp will probably be very tough on you. It's even worse here than in the county jail." Ting Chang-fa heaved a deep sigh and said: "Eh, there's no tobacco here, but I made myself a pipe. It's always empty, but I get a bit of relief from sucking at it!"

Liu Sze-yang smiled wryly. "Never mind, after a while we'll get used to it."

"I know that Yu Hsin-chiang is a worker. He's got calluses on his hands. After sitting here a couple of years, you'll get calluses on your arse too!" With a broad grin Ting Chang-fa hobbled back to his corner.

The oppressive silence was broken only by the rustling of the fan. As Liu Sze-yang's eyes roved aimlessly over the walls, something caught his attention and he stopped fanning. Among the scrawls and scribbles on the wall were a few words clearly written in dark red. With rapt attention Liu Sze-yang read:

> I have done all the Party taught me!
> Long live the Chinese Communist Party!
>
> Lu Chieh

These were a comrade's last words, written in blood! He did not know who Lu Chieh was, but he understood Lu Chieh's feelings. Some day he too might be called on to give his life for the truth. Would he be able to say the same when facing the firing squad? Would he have the same clear conscience? Liu Sze-yang scanned the sections of the wall lit up by the sun's rays. Beside Lu Chieh's last words were rows of deep marks. They looked as if someone had scratched them in the plaster with a fingernail. Liu Sze-yang was puzzled. He could not imagine what they represented. His eyes searched further along and rested on some boldly-written lines:

> Locked fast, the way out for men;
> Wide open, the escape hole for dogs. . . .

Liu Sze-yang wondered who had written this caustic comment, then read the rest of the lines aloud:

> A voice shouts:
> "Crawl out and have your freedom!"
> I long for freedom, but one thing I know —
> Men must not crawl like curs.
> And I await that day
> When the fire now underground
> Shall burn my body with this living coffin.
> And in fire and blood I will find eternal life.

As he came to the end, he couldn't help asking:

"Who wrote this poem?"

"Our corps commander, General Yeh Ting!" someone replied in a resonant voice.

Liu Sze-yang turned around and saw a tall man walking over to him. He had a military bearing to match his voice, and his grey cloth uniform was buttoned up to the neck in spite of the heat. Unlike the others who were in shorts, he wore a pair of long army trousers, and his military cap was set straight on his head. The sleeves of his jacket were rolled up above his tanned forearms.

"I'm from the New Fourth Army. Our corps commander wrote this poem when he was in Cell 2 downstairs. I wrote it out for everyone to read. My name is Lung Kuang-hua. I was stationed in the Central Plains Military District when the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries started the civil war, and was wounded while breaking out of their encirclement." He unbuttoned his uniform and showed Liu Sze-yang a huge scar on his right shoulder. "When I came round I was already a prisoner. I told them to finish me off with a bullet, but the bastards kicked me instead! Eleven of us were captured. Some died from their wounds, others were tortured to death during the march. Only Squad Leader Wang and I survived. We were brought here this year. Squad Leader Wang is locked up in Cell 2 downstairs, where our corps commander used to be. If I don't get out alive, that's that! But if I do get out and get my machine-gun back, I'll pump those reactionaries full of revolutionary bullets!"

Liu Sze-yang had been busy since his arrival in the cell caring for the injured Yu Hsin-chiang and familiarizing himself with the surroundings, and had scarcely spoken to his cellmates. He had felt self-conscious because he was too well dressed and had not been tortured, and wondered whether the others would be suspicious of him or coldshoulder him. But now he was gradually losing his misapprehensions. He should talk more with this outspoken soldier as well as with

the blunt peasant, and find the prison's Party organization if there was one. As he was thinking things over, a warder swaggered past the cell door, cooling himself with a fan. There was the rattle of a lock being opened.

"Cell 5! Exercise!"

There were no footsteps.

"Exercise!"

Still no sound.

"Come on out!"

What's wrong in Cell 5? Liu Sze-yang poked his head through the hole of the door and watched the warder yelling into Cell 5.

A low voice behind him said: "The people in most cells are so sick that they can't get up for exercise."

"Cell 6, exercise!" shouted the warder as he opened another door. Liu Sze-yang turned to Yu Hsin-chiang, thinking that someone must have left Cell 6 as the warder's calls had stopped.

After a while, the lock of their cell rattled and the warder pushed the iron door open.

"Exercise!"

Ting Chang-fa slowly moved, wiped the sweat from his brow and settled back again. Only Lung Kuang-hua made a move to get up. He went to the corner and reached for the brimming latrine-bucket.

"Let me take it." Liu Sze-yang had never done such a menial task before, but he was determined to get used to this new life and to bring himself closer to his cell mates. He put down his fan and stepped forward.

"All right, you empty the bucket. I'll fetch water!" Lung Kuang-hua picked up the water-pail and strode out of the cell.

Liu Sze-yang grasped the thick rope on the bucket. It took such an effort to lift it that the sweat started out on his forehead and his arm trembled. Biting his lip, he staggered out of the cell and down the stairs. Passing by the high wall, he crossed the sun-baked yard. Even the weeds at the foot of the wall

had shrivelled up, and he wondered where Lung Kuang-hua could possibly find any water.

The latrine was littered with soiled papers and bamboo shavings, smeared with black clotted blood and thick mucus. The air was buzzing with swarms of bluebottles and there were thick wriggling clumps of maggots on the floor.

As Liu Sze-yang emptied the bucket he was overcome with nausea. His head seemed about to burst and his limbs were numb. He swayed dizzily and leaned against the wall, his head reeling. He had been shut up for more than a month in the dark cells of the Second Department where no sun ever penetrated and the effects had told on his strength. Painfully he picked up the bucket and staggered out of the latrine.

The narrow yard now seemed vast and empty, and the stairs steeper. Before he had gone up many steps Liu Sze-yang's ears began to ring and spots danced before his eyes. His strength ebbed away, and the cell doors swayed. . . .

"What's the matter?" Lung Kuang-hua took the bucket and helped him back into Cell 7. Lung Kuang-hua flung the water-pail into the corner. "I couldn't find a drop of water. There's nothing too mean for these damned reactionaries!"

Liu Sze-yang pulled himself together and went to see to Yu Hsin-chiang. The close-packed prisoners feebly twisted and turned as they lay on the hot floor, the breath rasping in their throats.

"The bastards!" said Lung Kuang-hua, his eyes blazing. "We'd die of thirst, but we will never surrender!"

A bald-headed old man pulled himself painfully to his feet. He looked around the cell as if about to say something, then pressed his hands to his chest and started to cough. Something seemed to be blocking his throat. His face went red and then pale, and his lips turned blue as he fought for air.

Ting Chang-fa and Lung Kuang-hua ran over, alarmed by his convulsive panting. Lung supported the old man while Ting gently pounded his back with his black and swollen hands.

There was the smell of blood on the old man's breath as it

came out of his wide-open mouth. He turned his glazed eyes towards the cell door and passed out.

After a while he came to. His eyes turned unseeing towards the low ceiling.

"Elder Brother, have a drink of water," someone pleaded.

Liu Sze-yang thought that he probably didn't know that the water bucket was empty, but the man added: "I've kept you a drop in my bowl."

"I'm feeling better now," the old man replied weakly. Slowly and faintly he gasped: "Keep — the — water — for — the — wounded."

It was dinner-time. The stench of burned and mildewed rice floated in from the corridor. Liu Sze-yang felt no hunger, conscious only of a great thirst. Lung Kuang-hua went out to fetch the food bucket, and shouted as he entered the cell:

"Comrades, time to eat!"

The rice in the bucket was almost black and as hard as gravel, and Liu Sze-yang's gorge rose at the sight of it. He licked his parched lips and turned his head away.

Lung Kuang-hua rattled and thumped the pail in an attempt to arouse his cell mates from their stupor, but none of them showed any interest. They knew what was in the bucket. A deep silence lay over the room. No one rose or even looked up. Lung Kuang-hua's eyes were red-rimmed and filled with tears. He went up to the old man and pleaded with him:

"No one has touched any food the last two days. Elder Brother, we should keep our health for the revolution."

The old man they called "Elder Brother" propped himself up against the wall. To Liu Sze-yang's surprise he said with iron determination: "Everyone get up and eat! . . . All of you must take a little. . . . Give me some first. . . ."

The men lying on the floor slowly opened their eyes.

Liu Sze-yang hesitated a moment, then dug the scoop into the hard, dry rice. Half filling Elder Brother's bowl, he handed it to him with a pair of chopsticks. Elder Brother took a mouthful and gasped. His face turned red and he pounded

his chest to force the rice down. Rapping his bowl with his chopsticks, he repeated: "Everyone — eat — a little.... Don't let the enemy despise us!"

All followed Elder Brother's example and forced themselves to sit up. Ting Chang-fa said with a grin: "Give me a bowlful!"

Another man raised his bowl and volunteered without further hesitation: "Give me half a bowl." Others passed over their bowls: "Give me a little too...." "I want a third of a bowl...." "Me too...."

They spoke through clenched teeth, and Liu Sze-yang could see that they were suffering. Swallowing the hard, dry rice in spite of torturing thirst had become a sort of battle to the prisoners, a refusal to submit to oppression. It was their unconquerable fighting spirit and will-power that made them follow Elder Brother's advice. Liu Sze-yang filled the bowls one by one and then forced himself to swallow a few mouthfuls. He kept some for Yu Hsin-chiang who was still unconscious. When they had all put down their bowls and chopsticks, he went round with the food left in the pail. Lung Kuang-hua called out heartily for some more and took another half a bowlful. He was the only one to do so. Liu Sze-yang finally took out the pail, still more than half full, and set it beside the long row of pails already standing in the yard. Some were full and others hardly touched. Liu Sze-yang looked at them and suffered silently. How long was this torture to continue?

Dusk gradually closed in, with oppressive silence.

Agents opened the iron doors and searched each cell. Their raucous shouts, as they took the roll-call, sounded like the cries of wild beasts. A few stars began to twinkle in the sky, but heavy clouds soon blotted them out. It was dark and stifling in the cell, and the low ceiling was like a lid over their heads. Clouds of mosquitoes whined in through the bars of the door. The half-naked men on the floor, whose veins had almost dried up from thirst, heat, illness, and torture, had not the strength to wave them off.

Liu Sze-yang did not know how long he had been lying on the scorching floor. In the middle of the night the wind whistled through the eaves and cooled the cell a little. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled in the distance, gradually coming nearer and louder. Suddenly a deafening thunderclap startled him out of his doze.

Bamboo clappers were being beaten in a nearby watch-tower. The signal was taken up by a second tower, then a third. Liu Sze-yang listened and wondered what they meant. Suddenly the rhythm of the clappers speeded up.

Bong — bong — bong! Bong — bong — bong!...

"Listen, they're coming for someone!" a cell mate said tensely.

Lightning crackled and was followed by another loud clap of thunder. Barking police dogs were coming. A lock rattled and there was a loud clank as the door of the next cell was flung open.

"No. 5013! Out you come!"

"No. 5013!"

Liu Sze-yang rushed to the cell door and thrust his head through the hole. A flash of lightning lit up the figure of a tall, thin man stepping calmly out of the cell. A pair of handcuffs gleamed as they were snapped on his wrists.

Another flash lit up the staircase as the man walked down the steps. He suddenly stopped before one of the women's cells, waiting as if to take leave of someone. He stood like a statue in the wind and lightning. A moment later a long-haired woman heavy with child appeared at the cell door in a blood-stained gown. Stretching both arms through the bars, she gripped the manacled hands of the tall man.

"Who are they?" someone asked.

"I don't know. They were brought in yesterday from Yunnan," came the answer out of the darkness.

Their clasped hands separated for all time.... The manacled man suddenly swung up his arms and shouted above the thunder:

"Farewell, comrades! When liberation comes, give my greetings to the Party and to the comrades! Long live communism!"

Another peal of thunder was followed by a flash of lightning. In its light Liu Sze-yang saw Ting Chang-fa making a deep groove in the wall with his fingernail. So that was the meaning of the rows of marks! They were the record of secret executions! Several rifle-shots and the blood-curdling howls of police dogs pierced the night.

Huge rain drops drummed on the roof, and it seemed as if the furious elements were about to engulf the universe. . . .

Ting Chang-fa stood by the wall, digging his plaster-filled nails into the palms of his hands.

The iron door quivered under Lung Kuang-hua's onslaughts as he shouted in helpless rage: "Give me a gun! I'll kill those bastards."

12

SEVERAL days of heavy rain had cooled the atmosphere. From behind Chatzetung came the sound of water cascading over the cliffs.

A breeze blowing into the cell, and the birds' dawn chorus woke Yu Hsin-chiang early. He had gradually regained his faculties as his wounds healed, and the chill of early dawn made his head feel quite clear. He rolled over and sat up.

The sky was just beginning to brighten and most of his cell mates were still sleeping, some snoring lightly. An early riser was standing by the window, quietly doing bayonet practice. By his uniform Yu Hsin-chiang recognized him as Lung Kuang-hua. Yu Hsin-chiang found much to admire in the way he had retained the habits of army life. Not wishing to disturb him, Yu stepped over to the window. Outside was a stretch of bare ground, and beyond that a high wall topped by electrified barbed wire. All he could see beyond that were the towering crags. There was not a wisp of a cloud in the blue sky which augured a fine day after the rains.

Yu Hsin-chiang looked at the men curled up on the floor. The bald-headed old man turned around in his sleep. His face was familiar. Yu Hsin-chiang could not remember where he had seen him before and did not know his name, though he had heard the others deferentially call him "Elder Brother." He was very sick and seldom spoke. It was evident that he was the most respected man in the cell.

Elder Brother coughed once or twice, then pulled himself up and leaned against the wall. Yu Hsin-chiang watched him as he slowly massaged his aching chest. He was sure that he had seen this man before, but he searched his memory in vain.

The door clanked open. A warder poked his head in and yelled:

"Get up! Exercise!"

The prisoners were rudely awakened. The warder grinned malevolently and walked off.

"The bloody Bear."

The warder they called "the Bear" suddenly reappeared and asked ferociously: "Who are you talking about?"

Lung Kuang-hua stepped forward and looked him in the face. The Bear saw that every eye was focussed on him in a hard stare, recoiled, and hastily backed out of the door.

"Exercise before daybreak? The Bear is being awkward again!" someone snorted.

Liu Sze-yang went to pick up the latrine bucket, but Lung Kuang-hua stopped him. "Give it to me. You and Ting Chang-fa go and fetch water." He took the bucket and strode swiftly out of the cell.

"All right," said Ting Chang-fa, pushing his empty pipe between his teeth. "We'll get it."

Elder Brother coughed several times and asked Ting Chang-fa if he had any more Tiger Balm ointment. Ting fumbled in his pocket, handed a little box to Yu Hsin-chiang and then went out of the door with Liu Sze-yang, who was carrying the pail.

All the rest of the inmates, including the sick, slowly rose to their feet and went out to get a breath of sweet morning air.

Yu Hsin-chiang opened the little box of ointment but found it empty. He held it to Elder Brother's nostrils, so that he could at least get a whiff of camphor. As he did so he saw a big black mole with a tuft of hair behind Elder Brother's left ear. His mind travelled back over ten years to the time when Elder Brother had been his night-school teacher, and had been in the habit of tweaking at this mole in lessons.

Seeing that they were alone in the cell, Elder Brother asked slowly: "Is your name Yu Hsin-chiang?"

Yu Hsin-chiang nodded. Could it be that Elder Brother still

remembered his pupil after so many years? Yu Hsin-chiang had only been twelve or thirteen years old at the time.

"Where are you from?" asked Elder Brother.

"Wuhan."

"No wonder you've got a Hupeh accent. Been in Szechuan long?"

"I came to Chungking with the Hanyang Ordnance Plant when Wuhan fell to the Japanese." Yu Hsin-chiang mentioned the Hanyang Plant because it was there that he had attended the workers' night school.

"Yes, Wuhan's a good place. We must revisit Mount Turtle, Mount Snake, and Yellow Crane Pavilion when we have the chance." Elder Brother seemed to forget his pain for the moment, and raising his head he began to recite with deep feeling:

> Eastwards flows the mighty river,
> Its surging waves outlasting the heroes of a thousand centuries. . . .
> Rugged cliffs pierce the clouds.
> Leaping billows break themselves against the shores, hurling up drifts of snowy foam!
> Ah, how beautiful the mountains and rivers of my country!
> How many her great men! . . .

"I was a teacher. I taught Chinese literature in Chengtu for many years before I was arrested in 1940. People have called me Elder Brother since I came to this prison."

"Elder Brother!" said Yu Hsin-chiang.

Elder Brother smiled and looked at Yu Hsin-chiang between swollen eyelids.

"Elder Brother," continued Yu Hsin-chiang, "I used to know a teacher whose surname was Hsia. He was arrested ten years ago in Wuhan."

"Hm —" Elder Brother grunted noncommittally.

"After teacher Hsia was taken away we workers' kids at the night school wanted to revenge him, and we used to throw stones at the police every night." Yu Hsin-chiang lowered his voice as he said: "I remember what teacher Hsia looked like to this very day."

"No one will forget those days," Elder Brother also spoke in lowered tones. "I remember a pupil whose father, a Communist, was wounded during the railway workers' strike of February 7, 1923. I still wonder how that boy is getting on."

"Teacher!" Yu Hsin-chiang clasped the bony hand tightly. "Teacher Hsia!"

"I'm not called Hsia any more," Elder Brother whispered into his ear. "The enemy does not know about my past. I was arrested again in Chengtu and was sent from one prison to another with Comrades Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien* I was with them at Hsifeng and then at Pai House concentration camps. I never revealed my identity . . . you must always call me Elder Brother. . . ."

Yu Hsin-chiang listened with silent emotion.

"I recognized you the moment I saw you," continued Elder Brother. "You are very much like your father. Yes — your father. . . . How is he now?"

Yu Hsin-chiang told him how his father had died during the March 23 railway workers' strike. Elder Brother was silent for a moment and then said with deep feeling: "Your father was a good comrade. I was in the same Party branch as him many years ago. Now you have inherited his cause and we are together again."

"Is there a Party organization at this camp?"

"Wherever there's struggle, there's the Party!" replied Elder Brother. "The Party organization here already knows about how you and Liu Sze-yang were arrested. The Party has decided that you two, Lung Kuang-hua and Ting Chang-fa are to form a Party group. Comrade Ting is to be your group leader."

Yu Hsin-chiang grasped Elder Brother's hand, overpowered by happiness.

"Was there any important news before you came here?"

* Lo Shih-wen was Secretary of Szechuan Provincial Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, Che Yao-hsien was in charge of the Szechuan Military Council of the CCP. Both were arrested by the Kuomintang in 1941 and killed in 1946.

"Chairman Mao has published an important article called "The Present Situation and Our Tasks." He says that the revolution has reached a turning point . . . I have learned by heart the main points of the article," Yu Hsin-chiang told him.

Before he could say anything else they were interrupted by a tattoo on the bamboo clappers. They listened intently.

"The prison van is coming," said Elder Brother. He shut his eyes and said no more.

The others came back one by one from fetching water, emptying the latrine buckets and taking exercise, then the iron doors were slammed shut and locked. Ting Chang-fa set the water-pail down in the corner. It was only half full. He had had to scoop it out of the muddy puddles left by the rain. He sat again in his customary place by the wall, drawing on his empty pipe.

Bong — bong — bong! Bong — bong — bong!

The beating of the bamboo clappers quickened.

"Yu Hsin-chiang, listen!" called Liu Sze-yang.

The roar of motors from the distant mountain pass could be heard. The bamboo clappers were silent and horns honked as some vehicles approached the concentration camp at a high speed. Yu Hsin-chiang pushed his way towards the cell door.

"Can you see them?" asked the others.

"Yes, there's a jeep followed by . . . a heavy lorry . . . they've stopped. They've opened the back of the lorry. . . . A stretcher . . . they're taking out a stretcher. . . ."

"A stretcher? Are you sure . . . ?"

"Did you hear," someone remarked after a moment, "there's a tough character by the name of Cheng Kang? He has been viciously tortured. . . . No one knows where he is."

Yu Hsin-chiang's heart leapt. He had seen Cheng Kang, the manager of his plant, at the Second Department, almost dead from his tortures. Could he be the man on the stretcher?

Inmates crowded to the cell doors. The whole concentration camp was excited. Warders with pistols in their hands clattered up the stairs, and the iron gate in the high wall creaked

open on its rusty hinges. Agents hastened across the yard with the stretcher and made straight for the staircase. A harsh clamour of shouts followed the stretcher up the steps. . . .

Heavy feet pounded the creaking floorboards and one could hear the dull clink of metal against wood. Yu Hsin-chiang stood on tiptoe and looked out, but could see nothing. The clinking continued. His heart contracted.

"What's that noise?" someone behind asked.

"I don't know. . . ."

"Maybe those are leg irons. . . . We'll find out in a minute. . . ."

"They've passed Cell 3 . . . Cell 4. . . ."

They heard the agents open the door to the cell next door, Cell 8.

Yu Hsin-chiang craned his neck and looked over the heads in front of him. At last he saw the stretcher. The body of an unconscious man lay on it, covered with a tattered blanket. . . . It paused at their door, but he could not see the man's face as it was covered by the blanket. Bloodstained feet protruded from the other end of the blanket with heavy fetters fastened to them; a long chain dragged and clanked along the floor. The fetters had lacerated the man's ankles, from which blood and pus dripped down the chain. . . . The stretcher suddenly lurched forward and moved on again. The iron circlets around the swollen, infected ankles tore at the exposed ankle-bones like a saw. . . .

The stretcher was carried into the empty cell, No. 8. The floor of the corridor was stained with dark red spots.

The inmates of the cell below them rapped on the ceiling and asked anxiously: "Who is it?"

The sound of approaching steps was again heard. Lung Kuang-hua reported: "Bear is coming with a straight-backed chair. . . . He also has a chest-vice and ropes."

Yu Hsin-chiang pressed against the cell door, anxiously staring in the direction of Cell 8.

The flush of dawn melted away as the sun rose above the mountain peaks, throwing its heat over the earth. Nothing moved on the distant hills, and the electrified wires visible from the cell door were as motionless as a photograph.

Warders stood guard at the entrance of Cell 8, their bayonets flashing in the sunlight. No one was allowed to approach this cell where the seriously injured man was lying unconscious.

An agent walked past Cell 7, carrying half a bowl of rice gruel to Cell 8. He brought it out untouched. At dusk, food was again taken into Cell 8 and again brought out.

Yu Hsin-chiang stood several days by the cell door anxious to find out about the newcomer, but in vain. As another oppressive night descended another black cloud of mosquitoes flew in through the window bars. The beating on the bamboo clappers continued until daybreak.

At the first faint glimmer of dawn, Yu Hsin-chiang resumed his anxious watch by the cell door. His heart was heavy with the premonition that the torn and bleeding comrade must be an important Party cadre who had fallen into the enemy's hands.

Through the electrified wire on the wall Yu Hsin-chiang watched a sturdy proud eagle soaring into the morning sky, circling over the barren ravines, then rising above the mountain peaks and flying into the distance. Yu Hsin-chiang rubbed the wounds his torturers had left. They had almost healed, and the scars were less prominent. He felt an inexpressible yearning for freedom as he watched the flight of the eagle. He thought of Chen Sung-lin and countless other comrades and wondered how the struggle was going out beyond the walls. Which provinces, cities and towns had the People's Liberation Army reached? When would he hear the clarion call of victory? When would he be fighting alongside his fellow workers again? Where were Lao Hsu and Cheng Kang imprisoned now?

The sky brightened. Suddenly he heard the clank of an iron chain ringing sharply in the early morning silence.

Everyone in Cell 7 sat up and listened. The sound came from Cell 8; it was a hero's battle song.

The serenity of the morning vanished. The cells were still silent, but tense expectancy showed on every face. The new comrade-in-arms had been almost dead when they had carried him in on a stretcher. Now, only a few days later, he was on his feet, despite the heavy fetters, despite the even more cruel tortures that he must know were awaiting him, despite the heavy iron chain that tore like a steel file at his raw ankles. The steady footsteps in this hell-hole were a sign of supreme contempt for the enemy. To all the inmates they seemed like a message, telling them not to worry about him, thanking them for their concern. The rhythmic steely clank became louder and more vigorous, stirring his own fighting will and that of every comrade!

The sound startled the warders. A repulsive-looking agent burst out of the office, a claw-like hand clutching the pistol at his belt.

"Who's he?" asked Liu Sze-yang.

"The Owl, the head warder," replied Lung Kuang-hua.

"A butcher with the blood of more than three hundred people on his hands," someone else added.

Yu Hsin-chiang saw the Owl staring at Cell 8 as he came into the yard.

"The Owl wants to stop the comrade next door from taking his walk!"

"Listen, this is his answer. . . ."

The comrades near the door heard the sound of low singing above the clinking of the fetters. Gradually the voice rose in volume. The *Internationale* rang out loud and clear:

Arise, ye prisoners of starvation,
Arise, ye wretched of the earth,
For justice thunders condemnation,
A better world's in birth!

This was the stirring battle hymn calling people everywhere to rise and fight the darkness of the world! It was like the greeting of a warrior, returning to his comrades from distant campaigns; the voice of a staunch son of the people, declaring

in the shadow of the gallows that truth will triumph!

Every heart thrilled to the words of the song.

No more tradition's chains shall bind us . . . several voices joined in.

Arise, ye slaves no more in thrall! Voices upstairs and downstairs took up the song until it swelled into a majestic chorus.

"Singing is forbidden!" roared the Owl and the other warders.

"I'll shoot anyone who doesn't stop!" He slapped his pistol.

The voices of the inmates were raised in thunderous unison, and they were not going to be stilled by the buzzing of those insects. The flood of song started by this unknown comrade grew until the nearby mountain peaks seemed to be shaken.

The ashen-faced Owl rushed towards Cell 8 screaming:

"Stop singing! Shut up! Hsu Yun-feng."

"Hsu Yun-feng?" someone exclaimed in surprise, and the next moment a cry of "Lao Hsu, Lao Hsu!" came from the women's cells.

Yu Hsin-chiang thrust his head out from the hole of the door and gazed towards Cell 8. Lao Hsu was right next door! His breast swelling with emotion, he sang fearlessly:

'Tis the final conflict!
Let each stand in his place!

Hsu Yun-feng stood by the cell door looking up at the stars. He was wide awake, though his comrades-in-arms in the other cells were already asleep. The only sound was the intermittent tapping on the bamboo clappers. The singing which had once again filled the corridors at dusk echoed in his ears, and still seemed to hang in the air.

You are the beacon,
Lighting up the waves before the dawn.
You are the helmsman,
Holding the ship on its course.
Oh, valiant Communist Party of China!
Around you we gather,
You are our guiding light!

The bulb shone dimly on Hsu Yun-feng's gleaming face. Since he had recovered consciousness he had become strongly aware of an indomitable force uniting the inmates of the concentration camp. It was invisible, yet he could see it in the faces of his sick, weakened and scarred comrades, in the bearing of these men and women who underwent fearful tests without a murmur, in those singing voices which expressed every man's determination.

This was just what he and the other members of the Municipal Committee had anticipated when they had studied the possibilities of establishing contact with the comrades in the concentration camps before his arrest.

Hsu Yun-feng was confident that he would soon find the Party organization here, and certain that it too was anxious to get in touch with him. The enemy had put him under solitary confinement to prevent him from adding strength to his comrades-in-arms in their bitter struggle against frenzied persecution. However, the enemy's efforts had proved futile. Hadn't the prisoners identified him as soon as he had begun to walk about? Comrades-in-arms could not be kept apart; no prison walls could separate them.

Hsu Yun-feng picked up the chains of his fetters and returned to his pallet on the floor, the only cover being the bloodstained, ragged blanket. He moved cautiously to avoid waking his sleeping comrades by the clanking of his chains. He lay down, but could not go to sleep. His thoughts kept returning to his comrades and the Party. Hsu Yun-feng was confident that the Party Underground would not discontinue the struggle because of the recent setback, but would consider what had happened and work out how to deal the enemy stronger and more telling blows in future. They would conceal the Party organization better. He was not distressed because he could no longer take part in the struggle outside; he had a new task before him, the protection of the underground Party organization at all costs. The enemy was not to have the slightest inkling about Li Ching-yuan, Comrade Shih and others on the Municipal Committee!

He also had to find the Party organization in the camp. It was essential to defend the solidarity of the inmates in the face of the enemy's persecution.

There was a faint hubbub of voices. Hsu Yun-feng raised himself and looked out of the grating, but the lighting was too dim for him to see anything. The heavy footfalls of a sentry clumped to and fro past the cell door.

A series of thin wails pierced the night. It dawned on Hsu Yun-feng that a baby had been born in the women's cells.

"A new life has come into being on the battlefield!" he thought. Picking up his fetters, he walked slowly over to the cell door, and stood there, gazing into the night.

The inmates of the next cell were also aroused by the cries, and soon an excited murmur filled the building. Someone was heard to ask: "Is it a boy or a girl?"

"A girl. A flower," came the reply from the women's cells.

A baby's smiling face rose before Hsu Yun-feng. "We must give her a beautiful name," he thought. He had great hopes for this baby, the same hope and confidence as he had for all the comrades in the concentration camp.

Night was receding and a pink hue already tinged the horizon. Hsu Yun-feng gazed happily towards the women's cells, as if in the hope of catching a glimpse of the tiny new-born creature.

He looked around his bare cell and saw the tattered blanket. He rolled it up, carried it to the hole of the door and tossed it out.

"Take the blanket to the women," he ordered a guard. "Let them make it into nappies for the baby!"

The first group of inmates were already on yard exercise. Their faces shone with a quiet happiness; the articles of clothing they had contributed were stacked outside the women's cells.

Cell 7 went out for exercise. Hsu Yun-feng suddenly saw Yu Hsin-chiang hurry through the yard with a pail in his hand then disappear behind the end of the building.

Hsu Yun-feng had noticed people going there in search of

water since the previous day. They had investigated every inch of the bare stretch behind the building, and had finally settled upon a spot not far from his window where the soil was moist and mossy. Muddy water had seeped up following the rain and formed a shallow pool. It was full of mosquito larvae and noisome bubbles kept erupting on the scummy surface. They had hoped that by digging downwards a spring might be unearthed.

The digging had begun the previous afternoon. Prisoners in fetters, limping women — all took a turn at the digging during their exercise. As they had no tools they scraped away the mud and stones with their fingers, and under their persevering efforts the hole grew larger. He had noticed in particular a one-legged woman softly singing as she worked. Her voice was sad yet strong, and he had been stirred by the words:

> We are born rebels,
> We'll set this topsy-turvy world aright!
> We'll sweep away this unjust society!
> Today we lie in prison,
> But what of it?
> So that our children will suffer no more,
> We are willing to stay here
> Till the prison walls fall down!

The water-hole had been finished by the previous evening but no water had risen. It might well up overnight, or perhaps they would have to dig deeper. If they struck a clear spring, the hundreds of comrades at the camp would no longer be tormented by thirst. Hsu Yun-feng was sure the enemy would not allow this, as it was a threat to their scheme to withhold water from the prisoners and was, moreover, a simple form of opposition. Nevertheless, he regarded the digging of the water-hole as necessary. It would strengthen the prisoners' unity, temper their fighting spirit and give them confidence.

Hsu Yun-feng walked across to the window, and looked out through the bars. The hole had indeed filled with water, its clear surface reflected the blue sky like a mirror.

Yu Hsin-chiang squatted by the water-hole, gazing raptly at

the water. He dipped his cupped hands into it and drank deep, then he lowered his pail into the pool, filling it to the brim. Hsu Yun-feng moved his feet, and at the sound of his fetters, Yu Hsin-chiang turned around and their eyes met.

"Lao Hsu!" Yu Hsin-chiang called out. "We're neighbours."

Hsu Yun-feng nodded.

"Take care of yourself," urged Yu Hsin-chiang, standing under the window.

Hsu Yun-feng smiled in reply.

Yard time was over, but Yu Hsin-chiang was most reluctant to leave. He stood there until Hsu Yun-feng's eyes told him he must leave, and with hesitant steps he slowly walked away.

Someone from the women's cells — a girl with a bright red ribbon in her hair — stepped lightly to the pool to fetch water. Hsu Yun-feng had seen her digging beside the one-legged woman comrade the previous evening. She filled her cup, but after a moment's hesitation stooped and poured some back. Hsu Yun-feng understood that the girl did not want to take too much, so that there would be more for the others.

The girl stood up and brushed back a wisp of hair. As she raised her head, she saw Hsu Yun-feng standing at the window. Smiling, she nodded respectfully to Hsu Yun-feng who nodded and smiled back. He watched her walk gracefully away from the pool. He had not known Sun Ming-hsia before, but her action at the water-hole told him a lot about her.

As she turned the corner, Lung Kuang-hua in a grey army uniform came running around the corner and nearly knocked the cup out of her hand. He nodded an apology and strode on towards the pool. Hsu Yun-feng looked at his faded cap, his warm and bright eyes and his tanned forearms, and watched him fill his pail without hesitating.

Less than a minute later, he was back at the pool, filling his pail to the brim.

He came a third time.

Hsu Yun-feng did not know why this soldier was taking so much water, but from his open and direct manner he could

see that it was from no selfish motive. He was, after all, a soldier of the people.

"So this is where you're hiding!" shouted a warder. "Yard time for Cell 7 finished long ago!"

The enemy was beginning to interfere and Hsu Yun-feng knew that a struggle was about to unfold before his eyes. . . .

"Did you dig this hole, eh?" growled the warder called "the Bear," kicking clods of mud into the pool.

"Hey! What do you think you are doing?" remonstrated Lung Kuang-hua. "As you refuse to provide us with water in this scorching hot weather, we have dug a hole to get some. Leave it alone!" He glared at the agent, then stooped to fill his pail.

"Where are you taking that water?"

"None of your business. I'm taking it to cells that haven't enough."

The Bear snatched the pail and threw it into the pool.

"Pick that pail up!" roared Lung Kuang-hua.

"Pick it up?" The Bear stepped up to Lung Kuang-hua as if to strike him.

"You dare!" said Lung Kuang-hua as he clenched his fist.

The agent stepped back, treading into the muddied pool. He reached for his gun and shouted:

"Are you trying to make trouble, Lung Kuang-hua? Come to the office!"

"Very well," Lung Kuang-hua squared his shoulders and strode off.

Hsu Yun-feng was worried. What was going to happen to Lung Kuang-hua? He could see that the struggle between the oppressors and the oppressed was about to break out into open violence. Once it started, there would be no time left for hesitation. The struggle would have to be carried on to victory regardless of the price. What worried him most was the fact that he had no way of communicating his thoughts to his comrades. . . .

Cries rose from all sides:

"Stop! Keep your hands off him!"

"Warders must not beat up prisoners!"

Hsu Yun-feng turned away from the window and walked to the door of the cell. Standing beside the door-hole he saw a lumbering hulk of a man come out of the office. It was the warden of the camp, an agent with the rank of lieutenant-colonel who dressed, spoke and moved about like a human being, but had underneath it all the heart of a beast. Everyone called him "the Gorilla."

"Lung Kuang-hua was digging under the walls in broad daylight. He tried to beat up a guard and start a mutiny," bellowed the Gorilla, trying to put a stop to the shouting from the cells with this slander.

A girl with a red ribbon in her hair ran out from the women's cells and refuted his lies in front of everyone:

"A pack of lies! We saw everything! The guard attacked Lung Kuang-hua when he went to fetch water!"

"Sun Ming-hsia! Did you see it with your own eyes?" the Gorilla glared at her balefully.

The inmates of the women's cells all rushed out and stood in a solid body around Sun Ming-hsia. "We all saw it! As clear as daylight!" they shouted, but the Gorilla only leered at them.

"You did, did you? Lung Kuang-hua has already confessed."

At that very moment, Lung Kuang-hua burst into the yard with warders close at his heels. Within a few minutes, his face had been battered to an almost unrecognizable pulp, and he was covered with blood from head to foot. He staggered to the centre of the yard, waving his cap and shouting:

"The agents want to stop . . . !"

Before he could complete the sentence, he crumpled to the ground. Blood gushed from his mouth.

Burning with anger, the women ran forward to help their bleeding comrade.

"Have a good look at that," said the Gorilla with a fiendish

grin. "Fill in the pool! All those who took a hand in digging it, step forward!"

Several hundred voices roared: "Warders must not beat up prisoners!" "Don't you dare fill in that pool!"

Hate and rage burned in all the eyes at the cell doors. The Gorilla recoiled several steps, and suddenly he bawled at the top of his voice:

"What? Mutiny? . . . Mount the machine-guns!" His face was hideously contorted as he shouted: "Do you want to mutiny? Who is your leader? Eh? Why doesn't anyone speak? If anyone's got enough guts, step forward!"

Several warders stood behind the raving Gorilla, rattling heavy fetters in their hands.

Suddenly the click of metal against the door of a cell upstairs startled Gorilla. A resonant voice called:

"Shut up! Stop this criminal behaviour."

The Gorilla shrank back, wondering who dared to scorn his authority and challenge him in such commanding tones? His frame shook as he saw the man at the door of Cell 8.

"Hsu Yun-feng? You — you — what are you trying to do?" he shrieked, as he stepped back.

Hsu Yun-feng stood calmly at the door of his cell, staring fearlessly at the retreating agents. Countless eyes expressed approval of his challenge.

13

SEVERAL days had passed. Lung Kuang-hua's comrades had nursed him day and night, trying to bring him back to health. The Gorilla had not been able to deny their accusations when Hsu Yun-feng and the other prisoners had exposed the enemy's vile behaviour. He dared not fill in the water-hole nor put any of them under solitary confinement. But the persecution of the political prisoners had not ended, and their resistance was growing stronger. Both sides were now locked in an unrelenting struggle.

The inmates of Cell 7 collected the vegetables they received for their meals — a few flat, tasteless beans with little oil or salt — and gave them to Lung Kuang-hua along with a little medicine they had forced their warders to bring. Despite this the condition of the badly wounded young soldier worsened daily.

The women prisoners sent half a tin of carefully hoarded milk powder to his cell that they had been keeping for Prison Flower, as Hsu Yun-feng had named the new-born baby. Her father had been executed on the stormy night before she was born, her mother had died in giving birth to her. Though his injuries were serious, Lung Kuang-hua refused to take the orphaned baby's nourishment and insisted that the milk powder be sent back. His comrades had to force it between his lips when he was unconscious.

Yu Hsin-chiang sat by Lung Kuang-hua, every now and then feeling his weak and irregular pulse. Under the dim electric light his sunken cheeks glimmered like those of a corpse.

His eyes were only half open, and occasionally he motioned

feebly with his hand. For many days Lung Kuang-hua had been repeating the same words over and over again:

"Brothers . . . march . . . into Szechuan . . . liberate . . . the whole country. . . ."

In his delirium, he sometimes shouted and sometimes mumbled. It was very late at night, but the weary Yu Hsin-chiang kept watch over his comrade. Once he leaned close and whispered to him: "Kaifeng and Loyang have been liberated. The armies of Liu Po-cheng and Teng Hsiao-ping are driving south!"

Lung Kuang-hua's mind had cleared temporarily, and when he heard the joyous news he looked at Yu Hsin-chiang with a faint smile on his face.

"Tell . . . tell the commander. . . ." Lung Kuang-hua once or twice tried to speak. His hands groping, he stared at the ceiling with dimmed eyes, as if he could see something up there.

Liu Sze-yang, who had watched over Lung Kuang-hua during the day, tossed and turned on his pallet but could not sleep. He sat up and felt Lung Kuang-hua's forehead. "The warders didn't bring any medicine today," he said in a worried voice.

Yu Hsin-chiang glanced at his cell mates sleeping on their pallets and then turned to Liu Sze-yang: "Everybody is tired out today. You had better go to sleep too. I'll wake you when your turn comes round."

Liu Sze-yang nodded, but remained beside Lung Kuang-hua. "Tomorrow we'll fight to get Lung Kuang-hua sent to hospital."

"Squad leader! Mountain guns!" Lung Kuang-hua suddenly called out clearly, "Listen . . . mountain . . . guns . . . ours!" He sat up, a faint flush of excitement on his palid face. Yu Hsin-chiang gently eased him down again.

"Our . . . mountain guns. . . ." Lung Kuang-hua mumbled, as if he was listening to something. "Listen, squad leader! . . . Boom, boom . . . the Liberation Army. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang also listened. He did hear artillery fire in the distance, but it was not from the guns of the P.L.A. The sound came from the ordnance works, where heavy guns were being

tested. Lung Kuang-hua was mistaken in his delirium, but as no one had the heart to disillusion him, he went to sleep happy.

He soon woke up again.

"It's . . . the Liberation Army," Lung Kuang-hua insisted, his sunken eyes dilated: "Mountain guns! I can tell . . . from the sound. . . ."

With a glow of triumph in his eyes, Lung Kuang-hua looked fixedly at the comrades watching him, and gasped: "I am . . . better now. . . . Go. . . . Get ready." After a while he repeated: "Go . . . ! Get ready to meet the Liberation Army."

Presently his fevered dreams left him and he fell back into a peaceful sleep. A burden fell from Liu Sze-yang's mind. He tugged lightly at Yu Hsin-chiang's sleeve and whispered:

"He's asleep. Take a rest."

Yu Hsin-chiang looked at Lung Kuang-hua, who was sleeping quietly. There was a faint smile on his lips, as if the rumbling of the illusory P.L.A. guns had brought him great comfort. His two watchers sat back to back, silent and exhausted from their days of patient vigil. They soon dozed off.

The prisoners were sound asleep. The bamboo clappers beat monotonously, and from the enemy's arms works in the distance came the oppressive thundering of the new guns which were being tested day and night. . . .

Sometime later Lung Kuang-hua was again woken up by the artillery fire. He sat up and shouted: "Mountain guns!" Golden sparks flashed before his eyes and turned into countless red flags. A host of P.L.A. men charged by, cheering and brandishing gleaming submachine-guns. He was no longer in a concentration camp, his companions were no longer lying in misery beside him. . . .

"Squad leader! . . . Our troops . . . are here!" Lung Kuang-hua thrust out a trembling hand, stood up and staggered forward. "Political instructor! Political instructor!" He went forward as if he saw his own people:

"Political Instructor . . . give me . . . a gun!"

The prison light flickered. Lung Kuang-hua stood motionless

at the door, his head thrown back and one hand outstretched to take the weapon he was yearning for. . . .

Bong — bong — bong! Bong — bong — bong — ! Bong — bong — bong — !

Yu Hsin-chiang awoke with a start. He instinctively reached out to replace Lung Kuang-hua's blanket. The soldier was not there! Where could he have gone?

Liu Sze-yang also woke up. Rubbing his eyes, he caught sight of a tall shadow by the door.

"Why's Lung Kuang-hua standing there?"

Yu Hsin-chiang hurried over to support him, but Lung Kuang-hua did not respond. One hand still grasped the bar, and the other was thrust out before him. His lips were slightly parted as if he had not yet finished saying something. His wide-open eyes seemed to be staring into the distance.

Hot tears rolled down Yu Hsin-chiang's cheeks, as he woke the whole cell with the news that Lung Kuang-hua was dead.

Ting Chang-fa rushed to the door and put his arms round Lung Kuang-hua's stiff body, his eyes burning with pain and fury. He carried Lung to the middle of the cell and gently laid him down. Yu Hsin-chiang and Ting Chang-fa fastened the buttons on his bloodstained army jacket, so that in death as in life he would retain his military bearing. They rolled down his sleeves and covered his powerful hands. Ting Chang-fa looked through the dead man's pockets and found a needle and thread wrapped in a scrap of paper. The little strand of thread had been unravelled from a pair of old socks. The needle had been ground from a piece of bone and was sharp and shiny from use.

Yu Hsin-chiang carefully took something hard from Lung Kuang-hua's breast pocket. It was a gleaming five-pointed red star that he had kept next to his heart. None of his cell mates had ever seen it before.

Elder Brother looked at it for a few moments, then said: "Sew it on his cap!" He was certain that this would have been Lung Kuang-hua's wish.

Liu Sze-yang silently took the star, and threading the needle with a length of yarn, carefully sewed it to the cap.

The electric light threw a sharp, black shadow on the wall. The Gorilla moodily pushed aside the desk-calendar which bore the motto: Don't put off till tomorrow what you can do today. Opening the drawer, he took out a diary and the Parker 51 fountain-pen which the Special Adviser had personally presented to him. As usual, he intended to record the day's events before retiring. He wrote the date and a remark about the weather then stopped, too disturbed to write more.

The Gorilla remembered how Hsu Peng-fei had personally taken him to see the Special Adviser in the Plum Garden on the day he'd been given this pen. The American adviser had repeatedly enjoined him to use every possible means to force the political prisoners to knuckle under. All the Special Adviser's orders had been carried out, but the political prisoners showed no signs of disunity or wavering. On the contrary, it was becoming increasingly difficult to maintain discipline at the concentration camp. The Gorilla shuddered at the thought of facing Hsu Peng-fei.

Grasping the opportunity, he had fought back the prisoners' open resistance through Lung Kuang-hua. But what had been the outcome? The Gorilla's troubled eyes noted a passage he had written several days earlier:

"Water has been stopped for many days, but prisoners show no signs of weakening, have prevented attempts to fill in the water-hole. What can we do?"

The last words swam before his eyes. He again saw Lung Kuang-hua escaping from the torture cell and exposing everything.

The sound of voices came from the distance. What was the matter now? The Gorilla frowned as he looked out of the window but could not see anything out of the ordinary. Pushing aside his diary, he picked up several books. He tossed "Speeches by the Generalissimo" back on the pile and was

about to look for some useful hints in "A Study of Prison Psychology" but angry shouts and stamping made it impossible for him to concentrate.

The sad news of the death of Lung Kuang-hua had just reached the other cells.

Unable to remain seated any longer, the Gorilla pushed back his swivel-chair, went to the window, opened it, and listened intently.

The shouting was very close, just on the other side of the high wall, and it seemed to burst from every cell. This was the first time that the prisoners at the camp had made so violent a commotion in the middle of the night.

"What a fuss over one dead man!" bellowed the Owl from the verandah outside the window. "Carry the corpse away and be done with it!" "They . . . won't let us touch it," replied the warders hesitantly. The Owl pounded down the steps in a fury and howled: "Take it out and bury it!"

Cold and hard as steel came the prisoners' reply:

"The body can't be moved until the whole business is sorted out!"

The Gorilla sensed that the prisoners were firmer and more determined, and a frightening silence told him that the warders had not plucked up the nerve to enter the cell for the body.

"Is this mutiny? Any more trouble and I'll have you all shot!" The Owl screeched, his lungs almost splitting.

"Don't think you can hush this murder up."

"Don't touch Lung Kuang-hua!"

Who was prompting them? What gave them the audacity to make such a row? The Gorilla was aware of a new note in their voices. If he applied any more pressure, the whole business might blow up in his face! The Gorilla continued to stand frowning before the window. He was feeling more and more troubled. Suddenly, he turned and pushed open the door. It had started to drizzle and the moss on the stone path was slippery.

"No more beatings! No more beatings!"

The vehement shouting from the cells struck him with the force of an explosion. What an idiot the Owl was! Why did he use force! What use were fists and bullets in a complicated situation like this? The Gorilla's disquieting thoughts were interrupted by another outburst.

"No more murder! Hands off the body!"

The roars of the prisoners came from all directions — upstairs, downstairs and the women's cells — with the irrepressible fury of an erupting volcano. . . . What if these hundreds of Communists mutinied? The Gorilla lost control of himself. He ran into the yard, shouting: "Will everybody please be quiet so that we can talk things over!"

The shouting grew even louder.

"No maltreatment of political prisoners!"

"Stop inhuman persecution!"

The Gorilla recoiled several steps, then managed to say: "I guarantee to bury the deceased with the proper rites. If there is anything you want to discuss, you may send representatives. Let the warders take the body away."

"Settle the responsibility, or the body stays!"

The Gorilla gave in.

"All right, leave the body there for the time being. Who is your representative?"

"Everyone in Cell 7!"

Things were going from bad to worse. If all the inmates of Cell 7 were allowed out, how could he handle them? He groaned to himself, then tried to placate the prisoners:

"It's very late. Please be calm everybody. Will Cell 7 kindly send one or two representatives tomorrow to negotiate a fair settlement with the administration?"

The Gorilla knew that scenes of this sort were best ended quickly. He spun on his heel and sneaked off amidst unbroken roars of fury. No sooner had he reached his office than the Owl burst in.

"Give 'em a bullet each! Kill anyone who makes trouble!"

"Head-warder, the matter is not as simple as that!" said the

Gorilla slowly. "Executing prisoners is beyond the scope of our authority. If we're not careful, we may even be accused of bad administration. Things have been going wrong ever since Hsu Yun-feng was sent here, and to make matters worse Lung Kuang-hua has died."

The Gorilla felt very much like a man trying to wade through a rushing torrent: the least slip and he would be sucked into some fearful whirlpool. He glanced at the sullen Owl and tried to calm himself. "Double the sentries tonight. We'll wait and see what happens. Let them shout, and don't interfere on any account."

Yu Hsin-chiang and Liu Sze-yang walked side by side through the corridor towards the yard.

The camp was silent except for the tense footsteps of the additional guards. The singing and protests of the prisoners had stopped. The comrades were silently mourning the passing of the murdered Lung Kuang-hua.

Grim faces in the cell doors watched their representatives on their way to negotiate with the enemy.

Yu Hsin-chiang and Liu Sze-yang thought of Elder Brother's parting instructions: "Comrade Hsu Yun-feng says we must stick to our conditions and demand a public funeral service for Lung Kuang-hua. We must crush the enemy's arrogance, change the balance of forces, and smash their schemes of persecution and maltreatment of political prisoners! You have the support of all the comrades. Don't make any concessions." With these words fresh in their minds, they strode into the Gorilla's office.

The Gorilla got warily to his feet and invited them to be seated. He feigned surprise and asked coldly:

"Who told you to come here? What do you want?"

Liu Sze-yang's mouth twitched with suppressed rage. Yu Hsin-chiang glared at this arrogant, blustering enemy agent and clenched his fist.

"We are the representatives of all the prisoners here," he

shouted. "We protest against your inhuman tortures! We protest against the wanton slaying of political prisoners!"

"Why do you want to negotiate?" the Gorilla banged his desk. "I'll see to it that the deceased is buried. There is nothing to negotiate."

"You promised publicly to negotiate. Are you now refusing? Very well," Yu Hsin-chiang retorted, "we'll tell everyone that you've gone back on your word!"

They turned to leave.

"Wait!" the Gorilla hastily called them back. "Let's talk this over quietly."

His challenging eyes lit on Liu Sze-yang. "What are your terms?"

There was no hesitation in Liu Sze-yang's reply:

"Firstly, the corpse is to be shrouded in white silk and buried in a coffin with due rites."

Their gazes met and locked in a battle of wills.

"What's the second?"

"From now on all seriously ill prisoners must be sent to hospital."

"And what else?"

"All inhuman persecution and maltreatment of the political prisoners must stop and living conditions be improved."

"So that's all."

"No. Fourthly, we demand a public memorial service for the martyr Lung Kuang-hua."

"Public memorial service?" the Gorilla softly repeated these strange and terrifying words. The challenging gleam returned to his eyes as he turned icily to Yu Hsin-chiang: "And if I don't agree?"

"We'll go on a hunger strike!"

"Hunger strike?"

"Yes, we shall refuse to eat until you accept all our terms."

The Gorilla was silent. He hadn't expected to have such a difficult problem on his hands. Such terms would completely disrupt his schemes to break the political prisoners and a memo-

rial service for Lung Kuang-hua would be tantamount to a public admission of guilt! The agent was at a loss for words as Liu Sze-yang continued: "Do you agree to these terms or not?"

"What kind of terms are these!" A sneer leapt into the Gorilla's face. "Hunger strike? Do you think you can behave this way in SACO? You must be out of your minds! If you really want to give it a try, just go ahead!"

"Do you or do you not agree to our terms?" asked Yu Hsin-chiang and Liu Sze-yang with one voice.

"There's a saying 'birds cry plaintively before they die, men speak kindly in the presence of death.' I, personally, deeply sympathize with you. There's nothing strange in the fact that one should be carried away by one's emotions when someone dies. . . ."

"Do you or do you not accept our terms?" Liu Sze-yang and Yu Hsin-chiang were adamant.

"What do you expect me to do?"

"We represent all the prisoners. We want a straight answer. Do you or do you not agree to our terms?"

The Gorilla's face darkened.

"Whose representatives?" he suddenly snarled. "Who sent you?"

A cold smile was the only answer he got.

The Gorilla pressed a button, and the Bear came into the room, carrying heavy fetters.

The Gorilla grinned diabolically: "Inciting mutiny! I'll teach you how to behave! We'll see who wants to negotiate. Put them in heavy irons!"

Yu Hsin-chiang and Liu Sze-yang glared at the Bear who dragged the fetters towards them. They were locked up in a solitary confinement cell next to the women's prison building. They had not retracted a single one of their terms.

The news that the representatives had been locked up flew round the cells, but to the Gorilla's surprise the prisoners' reaction was disquieting silence. He had hoped to discover the prisoners' leaders this way, but though their representatives

were in solitary confinement, they had not given in, nor had anyone else come forward. He had not the remotest idea what his adversaries' next move would be and was very anxious.

As he was looking round his solitary confinement cell Yu Hsin-chiang suddenly heard several piercing blasts on a whistle. Through the bars he saw the Bear stamping up and down the stairs bawling orders, his brutal face bloated and purple. A long row of food buckets was standing by the high wall, and nobody was coming to collect them.

"Yu Hsin-chiang, the hunger strike has started!" Liu Sze-yang cried out with excitement.

The prisoners in the other cells were waving greetings to them. The Bear, almost bursting with fury, shouted: "Now listen to me, you've got exactly three minutes to decide. If you don't take your food within that time, there will be no more today!" A pack of warders echoed his threat. The door of Cell 7 clanked open.

"Number 3148! Get your food!"

"Come on out! Do you hear?" the warders yelled. They were answered by a chorus of shouts:

"Comrades, the hunger strike has started!"

"Accept our terms, release our representatives!"

"Release our representatives. Hold a memorial service at once!"

"No food till victory!"

A hush fell over the prison. Not a man spoke, and they all felt that they had something more powerful than angry shouts to back them in their struggle.

Alarmed by the recent uproar, the Owl dashed into the yard at the head of a swarm of agents, yelling commands and deploying his men as if for battle.

"Now listen to me, everyone of you! Anyone who disobeys orders or makes a row will be shackled with the heaviest irons!" he announced. "That's the new regulation!"

Two of the agents crooked their legs and pretended to drag

their feet painfully. "Ha! The heaviest irons! Try them for three months and see how you feel."

The cell doors were opened. There was a heavy silence broken only by the breathing of the secret agents. It was as if all the protesting prisoners had suddenly disappeared.

"Mutiny!" screeched the Owl, as he darted forward peering in the gaping cells.

"Get this into your thick heads: the Communists haven't taken Chungking yet. Don't think you are the bosses here. We don't have to take your orders! What we say goes; do you hear me? Come out. Get your food."

No one appeared at the cell doors.

The Owl signalled to the warders who had brought the food in and ordered: "Take it away! If they won't eat it we won't bring it to them. Take it away."

It was late at night. The Gorilla sat alone in his office, gazing blankly before him. The hunger strike had been going on for three whole days. Contrary to his expectations, the prisoners had started the hunger strike without making any more representations, and they were not showing the least inclination to compromise. He was completely unprepared for such a turn of events. If this stalemate continued, the devil only knew what might happen! Tomorrow or the day after, when the cell doors were opened for yard exercise he might be confronted with dozens of corpses. It was quite possible that not one of the hostages wanted by the Special Adviser would be left alive at the camp!

Accept their terms? That would be unprecedented at SACO. Yet if he allowed several hundred hostages to commit collective suicide he would be in deep water himself. When the authorities began to investigate later it would not be a simple charge of dereliction of duty; he, his superior Hsu Peng-fei, and the whole Southwest Special District Headquarters would probably be severely punished. And if the Special Adviser got really angry anything might happen.

Previously he was very worried that the smouldering resentment might have burst into open revolt. He had strengthened the guard and taken every precaution to deal with any emergency. He was confronted now with something much more difficult to deal with than a mutiny. In the event of a revolt, he would be justified in ordering his men to open fire, but as it was, shooting would achieve nothing.

Weighing the pros and cons, he thought that it might be best to accept their terms. But dare he make such a decision? The Gorilla looked at the telephone, trying to summon up the courage to ask the Second Department for directions. He hesitated.

The drumming on the bamboo clappers gradually stopped as a grey dawn crept into the valley. The dispirited Owl pushed open the door and slouched in.

"Sir, it's four days already. If we don't think something up quickly, it'll be too late. . . ."

It wasn't often that the Owl looked so worried. With a gesture of annoyance the Gorilla sent him away. He was troubled enough himself and felt that he must get out of the office.

Shortly afterwards the Gorilla emerged from a cell and hesitated for a moment in the corridor. Then he walked slowly to the door of another cell and said with a sigh: "As the ancients say, 'A man's body is given him by his parents.' Just look at yourselves. Why destroy yourselves like this?"

There was a silence as if no one had heard him, but the Gorilla went on standing there.

"You know you shouldn't agitate for a memorial service. Why bring up again such unpleasant matters? What's the use of crying for the dead? Your request for a memorial service is totally unreasonable. . . ."

"Is arresting our representatives reasonable then?" retorted someone from a cell. Many other voices joined in.

"Stop stalling! Release our representatives and accept our terms!"

" 'Rites after death, and a procession at the funeral.' What's unreasonable about a memorial service?"

Their shouts made Yu Hsin-chiang look towards the cells. "The Gorilla is up to some trick again. Cell 1 has just chased him away."

Liu Sze-yang had also noticed this, but had not felt it worth commenting on. Liu Sze-yang had never been quite free of a feeling of embarrassment since his arrest. Unlike his comrades, he had not gone through the trial of torture, and because of this had never felt worthy of being called a staunch revolutionary. Now he was proud to undergo the test of hunger and to wear heavy leg irons for the first time. He never doubted the victory in this struggle.

"Yu Hsin-chiang, were you sleeping?"

Yu Hsin-chiang shook his head. "No, I was thinking. . . ."

"Were you thinking of Lung Kuang-hua?"

"Yes, of him and our struggle." Thoughtfully, he continued: "I don't know why, but I remembered something that happened a long time ago when I first went to the factory as a child labourer. One day after work I went to swim in the Chialing River near the stone embankment with several other kids who also worked in the factory. We were lying naked in the sun when a rich man came out of a summer house and yelled abuse at us. He said we were uncivilized and had no right to sun ourselves near his villa. At that time I didn't understand why everything, big and small, belonged to the rich and why they wouldn't allow poor people even a bit of sun. Well, when the country belongs to us, I'll go back and tell that pot-bellied capitalist: 'The sun is ours!' Maybe after the victory we'll be up to our necks in work, managing this and studying that, but no matter, I'll find the time to tell him: 'The sun is ours!' "

Yu Hsin-chiang glanced at Liu Sze-yang wondering whether he had understood him. He noticed Liu Sze-yang was looking even more emaciated than the day before and asked

him: "Lao Liu, did you ever realize before what it's like to go without food?"

"No, even during the anti-starvation campaign, I hardly realized what it meant to be hungry, not to mention having nothing to eat at all. For the first two days I thought I might not be able to stand it, but I don't feel like that now. Can you guess why?"

Yu Hsin-chiang shook his head. Liu Sze-yang continued: "I felt ashamed of my own hunger. Of course it didn't disappear because of that, but I made up my mind to fight it, to overcome it. After that, the hunger pangs seemed to be afraid of me and sneaked away. Yu Hsin-chiang, I've understood something I never did before. Elder Brother has told me of many things that have happened in the concentration camps. They have somehow become easier to understand. . . ."

The two talked in low tones about their feelings, and so the hours passed.

The meal-time whistles suddenly blew nearby for the first time for several days. Yu Hsin-chiang looked out and saw the Owl coming into the yard accompanied by a number of warders.

Several dozen food buckets were lined up in the yard. They held soft white rice instead of the usual dark mildewed grains. Savoury meat was being put on top of the steaming rice.

"Lao Liu, do you see that?" said Yu Hsin-chiang, looking with disgust at the agents as they ladled out the meat. "Now they are trying to tempt us! Shame!"

Liu Sze-yang also looked out. His lips curled into a smile, and Yu Hsin-chiang wondered why.

"Can you think of some way of getting in touch with the others?" Liu Sze-yang asked.

"What?"

"Yu Hsin-chiang, do you see why they are trying to entice us with white rice and meat? Is it because the enemy has become stronger? Quite the opposite! The enemy has given himself away. They're desperate and are beginning to waver.

We must find some way of telling everybody to hold out. Just one or two more days, and the enemy will capitulate!"

Liu Sze-yang felt that he had learned a great deal during the last few days. Yu Hsin-chiang sprang to his feet and said:

"Let me shout to the others. My voice carries well. They are sure to hear me. . . ."

"Look! There, upstairs! There's Lao Hsu!" Liu Sze-yang cried, interrupting Yu Hsin-chiang.

Yu Hsin-chiang looked up. He saw some blurred figures at the cell doors on the first floor. They gradually came into focus and a happy exclamation issued from his lips.

"Look, Lao Hsu is smiling. All the comrades are smiling!"

"Yes, Lao Hsu is smiling. There's no need for us to warn the comrades."

"To hell with it! Let them have their memorial service!" The Gorilla looked away as he asked the dejected Owl: "What do you think?"

The Owl stared, amazed at his superior's sudden about-turn.

". . . If we give in, how are we ever going to control them in the future? If the chief finds out. . . ."

"He's just phoned us. He told me to accept their terms."

The Owl glanced at the motto on the wall: "What our superiors are unable to see, hear, think of and do, we must see, hear, think of and do for them!"

The Owl said no more.

The Gorilla whispered confidentially: "The chief says we are to try to discover the ringleaders. If we make concessions, they will be emboldened by their success and the backstage controller is sure to expose himself! The chief says that Hsu Yun-feng is in solitary confinement, and those fellows in Cell 7 couldn't start all this row by themselves. There must be someone else, maybe even a central group!"

The Gorilla paced up and down for a few moments, then ordered: "Call out the guard! In ten minutes we'll hold a meeting of all the staff. Afterwards I'll go to the chief for instructions."

The next morning Yu Hsin-chiang was awakened by the sound of heavy footsteps. It was the Bear opening the cell door. While Yu Hsin-chiang looked him up and down, the Bear took out a bunch of keys and unlocked the shackles on his ankles, saying:

"The warden invites you to come to his office!"

Another agent freed Liu Sze-yang of his irons.

As they walked into the office, the Gorilla got up from his chair, nodding his head to them:

"Er — we agree to your terms."

"You must announce that in public," said Yu Hsin-chiang impassively.

"A gentleman never goes back on his word," the Gorilla assured them.

Several agents came in with a table of food. The Gorilla said with a smile: "Won't you two representatives first have dinner. . . ."

"Our hunger strike will only stop when the memorial service is over," answered Liu Sze-yang coldly, ignoring the food.

The Gorilla was now obsequiously polite: "Er — all right then. We'll hold the service immediately. Everybody has been without food for days, so let everyone eat as soon as it is over."

Without any further comment, Yu Hsin-chiang turned to Liu Sze-yang and said:

"Let's go. We'll stand in the yard and shout to all the comrades to get ready for the memorial service."

Although there was still some mist and rain the sky was clearing.

The doors of all the cells were wide open, but no sound came from them and no prisoners were visible.

As Yu Hsin-chiang and Liu Szu-yang were about to announce the news of their success, they saw Elder Brother, now as thin as a shadow, walking slowly out of Cell 7. He paused a

moment at the doorway, glanced at the clearing sky, then advanced with feeble steps. With him was another comrade, holding a tablet with the characters: "Sacred tablet of the Martyr Lung Kuang-hua."

Behind them came another prisoner holding up a ritual pennant.

Then came Ting Chang-fa and several other comrades bearing the body of Lung Kuang-hua in solemn silence. It was dressed in People's Liberation Army uniform. Stained with blood, patched in many places and frayed at the cuffs, it was still the glorious uniform of a people's fighter. Yu Hsin-chiang thought he saw the five-pointed red star gleaming in his cap.

Behind the pall-bearers, a pair of scrolls, the ink still wet, proclaimed with angry brush strokes:

> No upstanding man is afraid of death.
> A heroic ghost rather than a coward.

Hsu Yun-feng stepped out of his cell and followed his friends from Cell 7. Cells 5 and 6 and all the other cells came out one after the other, and in silent mourning the cortege slowly advanced.

The men wore black armbands torn from cotton jackets; and the women had put white bows made of strips torn from someone's shirt in their hair. With heads bent, the mourners streamed out of their cells into the yard. The only sound was the shuffling of their feet, but their faces told of the pain and grief in their hearts.

The poky prison yard was to be the scene of the last rites.

The prisoners lined up inside the heavily-guarded walls in their hundreds. Every heart pulsed with a yearning for struggle and revenge.

Sun Ming-hsia cradled Prison Flower in her arms. This was the first time the baby had been out in the sun. Her big bright eyes stared at the sky and at the faces of all the grown-ups who were so good to her.

By Hsu Kuang

A rope was strung across the high wall, and the reactionary slogans on the walls were blotted out as funeral scrolls made of scraps of lavatory paper pasted together, were hung from it. Blown by the wind, they rustled a funeral dirge. Beside the scrolls were wreaths plaited from the grass growing at the foot of the wall and in each of them was a slip of paper with the number of the cell which had made it. In the middle of the yard was an altar with sacrificial offerings, firecrackers, incense and candles. The tablet with the words "Sacred tablet of the Martyr Lung Kuang-hua" was placed in the centre.

Extra machine-guns had been mounted on the wall and were covering the closely packed prisoners.

In a heavy silence, the inmates of Cell 7 slowly stepped forward and lit the incense and the candles. Smoke curled skywards. The firecrackers frightened Prison Flower and her wails pierced the air. The cries of the poor child, born in misery, added fuel to the prisoners' burning wrath, as with heads bowed, they stood in silent tribute to the dead. Then they started to sing, softly at first, but swelling in power:

The flowers of victory
Bloom in the blood of martyrs.
Last year,
Dark clouds shrouded our land.
Today,
The people's forces have winged across the Yellow River,
Sweeping before them the enemy's defeated armies!
Before another year goes by,
The red flag of liberation
Will fly over every inch of Chinese soil,
Will fly over your grave,
Will fly at the gates of this dark prison!
Our descendants will read the martyr's grave stone
And remember your glorious name:

Member of the Chinese Communist Party
People's Liberation Armyman

— Lung Kuang-hua!

14

IT was a bright, sunny day in the farmers' busy season, and the marketplace in the little county seat in northern Szechuan was almost deserted. The streets seemed empty and desolate, although it was still quite early in the afternoon.

The only people to be seen apart from a few patrols from the "Communist Suppression Headquarters" were peasants delivering loads of firewood to their customers. The stone-flagged streets echoed with their footsteps as they hurried along with long strides.

A man with two big baskets of fresh vegetables stopped in a quiet lane near the town gates. He shifted the pole from one shoulder to the other, peered around, then walked up to the weather-beaten gate. "Granddad!" he called, and without waiting for an answer, pushed open the gate and carried in the vegetables.

Setting down his load, the sunburnt Hua Wei mopped the sweat from his forehead and looked at the rows of flower-pots on ledges on both sides of the main room that were arranged to serve as a warning signal when necessary. No danger was indicated so he crossed the yard and entered the room, but the old man in charge was not there. A big teapot stood on the table, and everything in the place was clean and bright. Hua Wei had been here many times before. Sister Chiang and his mother had once sat on the two stools by the wall and discussed plans. Later Sister Chiang had led a work team into the Tapa Mountains on the upper reaches of the Chialing River, and it had not been long before there were frequent reports that the peasants were struggling there against conscription, grain levies and taxes. Sister Chiang had recently sent a message informing them that the leadership wanted to hold a conference of all cadres at the Mount Huaying guerilla base. Since then another message had arrived, saying that she was arriving that day to have a talk with Hua Wei's mother and a few other comrades in preparation for the conference.

Hua Wei drank a bowl of cold water. Sister Chiang had always been punctual before, but now the sun was already sinking towards the west. He was worried. Where was the old man in charge of this post? What could have delayed Sister Chiang? She still did not know about what had happened in Chungking. . . .

Hua Wei pushed open the door of a side-room and saw a familiar blue cloth bag on the bed. So Sister Chiang had arrived. His mother had made that bag for her before she left the base area, and the fabric was now faded and yellowed with wear. Excited, Hua Wei picked up the bag and saw that there was a pair of dusty cloth shoes in it. His mother had given them to Sister Chiang when she was leaving. The uppers were still good, but the soles had been worn through on the long marches, then mended and worn through again.

Looking at Sister Chiang's belongings, Hua Wei seemed to see her warm smiling face and his anxiety was relieved. She had probably gone out on some urgent errand, and was sure to be back soon. Perhaps she hadn't eaten anything yet. He'd better go and see if she was in the kitchen. Just then, he heard her voice. She had come into the yard without his noticing. He hurried out to greet her.

"Hua Wei, where's your mother? Did you come alone?"

"Hello, Sister Chiang. Mother hasn't come down from the mountains."

They went into the room. Sister Chiang was travel-stained and her forehead was covered with dust and sweat.

"Have the promised weapons from Chungking arrived yet?"

"No. There's trouble in Chungking. Yu Hsin-chiang has been arrested. Mother told me to bring you back immediately."

"Yu Hsin-chiang arrested?" Sister Chiang was shocked.

Soon after Hsu Yun-feng and the others had been caught, a comrade had been sent from northern Szechuan to Chungking to arrange for the transport of arms to the guerillas. He had gone to call on Yu Hsin-chiang at the address given him by Sister Chiang, only to find that Yu had been arrested the previous day. Unable to get in touch with the underground organization and not daring to linger, he had returned the same night to report. Grandma was certain that the underground organization would soon send someone to give them a detailed account of what had happened in Chungking, but she thought it unwise to sit around and await for developments. She decided to discuss the matter with Sister Chiang, and then take countermeasures. No one yet knew that Hsu Peng-fei, acting on information supplied by the traitor Fu Chih-kao, had already sent large numbers of secret agents under the command of Shen Yang-chai, vice-director of the Southwest Special District, to northern Szechuan.

Sister Chiang immediately connected what Hua Wei had told her with the report she had heard that morning from Comrade Lan on the east bank of the river: plainclothes men from Chungking had been seen at the county seat. She saw that it was necessary to prepare for a possible raid by the enemy. She decided to settle her affairs at the county seat as quickly as possible and then return to Mount Huaying to get more direct news from Grandma.

"Mother has asked me to tell you," Hua Wei continued, "that she has decided to postpone today's meeting here because of the dangerous situation."

"Good."

Things had not been quite clear when the bearded Lao Lan had talked to her, but she was now convinced that the appearance of secret agents at the county seat was related to the trouble in Chungking. No one had yet come with detailed information from the underground organization there, but she felt that Grandma was completely justified in making this prompt decision at the first hint of danger.

"Why isn't the old man at home today?" asked Hua Wei.

"You've come just in time. Help me move away what's left here."

She told him that when she got to this liaison post, the old man had told her that some strangers had been loitering round the gate for the last few days. She had therefore decided that the liaison post must be moved without delay. The old man had left with some of the things, and Sister Chiang had gone out to scout around before coming back to dispose of the remainder.

Hua Wei understood. He began to search for some rope.

Sister Chiang sounded rather anxious: "This place has been used too long. It's easy for the enemy to find. I've told the old fellow not to come back. We'll remove anything that's left ourselves. The situation is changing, we must be more vigilant."

Hua Wei nodded and refusing her offer of help, went into the inner room to get the things together.

"You're tired out from the trip. Take a rest," he said. "We'll be climbing mountains soon."

Sister Chiang took a quick look around the now empty house, then put on a blue cloth gown, which she had been carrying in her bag, and combed her slightly ruffled hair.

Hua Wei hid the things Sister Chiang wanted him to take in his bundle of vegetables. She handed him a sheaf of papers and told him to leave first, their different styles of clothing making it dangerous for them to be seen together. They decided on a meeting-place. When Hua Wei had left, she went back and inspected each room once more with her characteristic caution and thoroughness.

Satisfied that nothing had been overlooked, she picked up her bag and walked towards the gate.

"Sister Chiang!" called a familiar voice.

A tall man in a worn blue gown was striding through the gate. It was Fu Chih-kao, thinner and more simply dressed than when he had seen her off at the wharf. He was delighted to see her and said:

"Sister Chiang, I've been searching high and low for you," he peered around somewhat nervously. "I've something important to tell you. Are there any strangers about?"

Sister Chiang hesitated, then suggested that they go inside. Not knowing that Fu Chih-kao had turned traitor, she wondered why he had come.

"The Aid-the-Countryside Committee has sent me with a secret consignment of arms," he said. "Find someone to unload them at once. You'd better go and check them yourself."

Sister Chiang looked at Fu Chih-kao, but said nothing.

"Comrade Lao Hsu sent me himself. Yu Hsin-chiang is ill."

"Yu Hsin-chiang ill?" Sister Chiang asked cautiously, and a furtive look in Fu Chih-kao's eyes did not escape her.

"He's got typhus, and has been in the hospital for some time. He's still on the danger list."

"Has Lao Hsu sent me a letter?"

"He was afraid it might be too risky, so he didn't write anything. He asked me to report to you by word of mouth."

"How has the situation been in Chungking recently?" Sister Chiang suddenly asked.

"There have been many changes since you left," Fu Chih-kao replied with a smile trying to give the impression that he could tell her anything she wished to know. "The mass movement is going strong," he went on. "All the factories joined in a May Day strike. The enemy couldn't do anything about it."

"Have any comrades been arrested recently?" she interrupted.

"No," asserted Fu Chih-kao. "What makes you ask? I live in Chungking and I haven't heard of any. It must be a rumour."

"Oh," she said in a non-committal tone, "so no one has been arrested? I was worried about the comrades." Then she inquired casually:

"How did you know I live here?"

"Lao Hsu told me!"

She knew that Hsu Yun-feng did not know the location of this liaison post. Li Ching-yuan knew of the location but he had

no connection with Fu Chih-kao whatever. She thought of what the old man had said about strangers loitering around during the last few days, and connected it with Fu Chih-kao's lie that Yu Hsin-chiang was sick.

"Have you eaten yet?"

"No, I've been too busy." Once more he urged: "The comrades on the lorry are waiting for us to unload the arms."

"All right," she temporized, "but there's no one here at the moment. You'll have to go to the base." She took out a piece of paper and a pencil. "Take this message to Mount Huaying. They will send someone to transport the arms."

"I don't know the paths in the mountains . . ." stalled Fu Chih-kao, not daring to accept the note which she held out.

"Don't you come from these parts? Just take the main road out of the city and you'll get to the mountains." Sister Chiang was now fully aware of the danger she was in.

"I've only just arrived and my movements may draw attention," argued Fu Chih-kao.

She did not insist. Her only concern now was to gain time for Hua Wei to get away.

"Sister Chiang, you'd better come to inspect the arms!"

"In just a minute." Still casting about for some means of escape, she went to the other side of the room and once more combed her hair. Several strangers were at the open gate. . . .

Fu Chih-kao paced restlessly up and down the room.

"Sister Chiang!"

She made no comment. Fu Chih-kao continued to stride up and down, then said excitedly:

"What great changes are taking place in northern Szechuan! The peasants are rising everywhere against conscription and grain levies. They're resorting to arms. Sister Chiang, you're doing a fine job here. The political awakening of the masses has the enemy in a state of perpetual terror. I hear that the Mount Huaying guerillas have tied down many enemy troops. That's great!"

Fu Chih-kao looked at Sister Chiang out of the corner of his

eye. She continued to sit silently, her face expressionless. The secret agents were now at the door. He changed the subject, and gushed:

"Sister Chiang, I'm really grateful for your help. I haven't forgotten the advice you gave me when we parted in Chungking, and I never will. I'll devote myself to the glorious, immortal cause of the proletariat.... Do you remember how we said then that victory was approaching, that the clouds would scatter and the sun shine over all the earth! Ah, I never thought that our beloved comrade Lao Peng would not be with us on the eve of victory. Sister Chiang, I am deeply grieved...."

"Shut up!" Her face darkened as she gazed at him in disgust. She knew she could not escape. Hua Wei was now far away and there was no need to waste any more time on this renegade. She asked him sternly:

"What, exactly, are you doing here?"

"You —" Fu Chih-kao shrunk back. His shifty eyes darted around, then he steadied himself and said with a smile: "I'm bringing arms."

"Who do you think you're fooling?"

"Lao Hsu personally instructed me to come!"

"Lao Hsu doesn't know this address!" Sister Chiang got to her feet and faced Fu Chih-kao. "What are you up to?"

"I've come with the best intentions. Don't misunderstand me!" stammered Fu Chih-kao, as he backed into the corner of the room.

"So you are the one who has brought those plainclothes men...." Her eyes flashed scorn at the cringing Fu Chih-kao. Slowly, and in a voice as hard as steel, she uttered:

"Shameless traitor!"

"Traitor? You call me a traitor?" Fu Chih-kao stood stock-still, his pinched face a mask of savage fury as he grated through clenched teeth:

"What has the Communist Party ever done for me? Why should I risk my neck for your lot? Humph! Living in fear day in and day out, having to submit to endless criticism and

recriminations with a smile! From Hsu Yun-feng, Cheng Kang . . . and from you! Every time we meet, it's always struggle, struggle. But let me tell you, I'm now a lieutenant-colonel in the MIB!"

"Shut your mouth!"

"I'll catch all of you. . . ." The traitor stepped forward. "I've had the devil of a time finding you. Go ahead! Try lecturing me again!"

He fumbled inside his gown and pulled out a black automatic which he pointed at her.

"Hands up! Chiang Hsueh-chin, I've got you at last!"

Sister Chiang glanced scornfully at the gun, and drawing herself to her full height, she challenged the craven-faced turncoat.

"Go ahead and shoot!"

Fu Chih-kao flinched. Step by step, she advanced, forcing him back to the corner of the room. Although he had a gun, he dared not look her in the eye. She raised her hand and resoundingly slapped the coward's face.

Secret agents swarmed into the room but stopped in amazement when they saw Fu Chih-kao cringing in a corner, one hand holding a gun and the other stroking his stinging cheek.

Sister Chiang smoothed her gown, and without a word walked proudly out of the house towards the open gate.

The fields were rich and green in the fullness of summer. The cloud-burst ended as suddenly as it had begun, and a many-hued rainbow arched across the sky behind Mount Hua-ying, vying in splendour with the sun. A cool breeze came from the banks of the Chialing River.

A bamboo sedan-chair, its white canvas awnings still wet, gradually came nearer.

The tall white pagoda pointing towards the fleecy clouds in the blue sky gave one a feeling of tranquillity and peace, but Grandma, who was sitting in the sedan-chair, felt anything but tranquil. Her calm exterior hid deep worries. Had she thought out all the possible contingencies in connection with the forth-

coming operation? Would they be able to rescue Sister Chiang? Was the information she had received reliable? The rhythmically swaying sedan-chair creaked cheerfully, but that did not dispel her anxiety and distress. How could she face the Party and her comrades, or honour the dead Lao Peng, if anything happened to Sister Chiang? Grandma was filled with bitter self-reproach and pain as she recalled Sister Chiang's kind, firm smile, and all the time they had been together.

The sedan-chair slowed down. It was being carried by Hua Wei and another young guerilla. They had stopped at the river bank. In front of them was a stone bridge where the enemy militia had set up a road-block and were searching all travellers.

"Let's go to the teahouse and have a rest," suggested Grandma.

The bearers advanced a few more steps.

"Hey you! Where are you from?" the militiamen shouted.

"Yuchiachang!" the bearers called back.

"Where to?"

"Straight along the main road into town."

The sedan-chair was carried up to the bridge and Grandma got out. Flicking the dust from her white silk jacket, she nonchalantly addressed the militiamen: "Another inspection? Everything is on the sedan-chair. Go ahead!" Grandma gestured impatiently towards the sedan-chair with a hand loaded with rings and precious stones. A gold bracelet weighed heavily on her arm as she waved a feather fan mounted on a betasselled ivory handle.

The militiamen dropped their bullying manner when they saw the glittering jewellery.

"We've been on the road for hours," said Grandma. "Let's have something to eat and set out again before it gets too hot!"

As she spoke Grandma walked imperiously towards the little teahouse beside the bridge and sat at a table near the door. The proprietress came forward with a smile.

"What can I bring you? Perhaps a bowl of eggs in rice wine?"

Grandma ordered a cup of tea for herself and two bowls

of rice gruel and beans for the bearers, then asked: "Why are things so tense near the county seat?"

"Ayah, haven't you heard? They say the Communists are about to attack the town. Everyone's in a dither, and all kinds of rumours are flying about. I don't know how many I hear every day!"

"Is it really as bad as that?"

"I guess you haven't been here before, have you?" the proprietress said. "Why, even the old men are afraid to venture out of their homes. A few days ago, I was told that they were going to arrest someone with a blue beard. All the bearded men were hauled in — white beards, black beards, grey beards, beards of all colours — but they didn't catch the Communist with the blue beard. Later, they said it had all been a mistake. It wasn't a man with blue beard they wanted, but a bearded man by the name of Lan."*

Having searched the sedan, the militiamen now came over to the teahouse and stood around listlessly.

"Did you see any Communists at Yuchiachang?" one of them asked. "They say the Communists control Running Horse Mountain. Is it true?"

"It's awful in Yuchiachang! All the rich people are in hiding or have run away, and the county won't send any soldiers," sighed Grandma.

"It's just as bad at the county seat," the talkative proprietress interrupted, "just look at the big notice on the gate tower. Why, the way it describes things you'd think there were Communists all over the place. They say that there is a 'Two-gun Grandma' among the guerilla leaders. She shoots with both hands and never misses. I don't believe it. Who's ever heard of an old woman who could do that! As for the county officials, they're like a bunch of clay idols crossing a river — each one's looking out for his own survival. Who's got time to worry about the countryside?"

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* Lan means blue in Chinese.

A militiaman interrupted: "The reward notice definitely states that there is a Two-gun Grandma. It's stuck right there on the door of your teahouse, can't you read it?"

"Arrest her? Impossible!" said another militiaman. "Why, she's a guerilla commander, and whenever she comes down from the mountains she has at least a hundred gun-slingers with her!"

"It's not impossible," said a fellow who seemed to be their leader. "Didn't the Communist Suppression Headquarters exhibit the head of a Communist commissar a short time ago?"

"Their political commissar is an immortal who came down from heaven to help the poor," said the proprietress knowingly. "Immortals cannot stay too long on earth, they must go back. Didn't you hear them say that political commissar Peng sometimes appears in broad daylight at Double River Village and performs miracles? Every day people stream to the place where he rose to heaven, to burn incense and kowtow!"

"Have you seen him perform miracles?"

"Lots of people have. When the poor see him their miseries lessen, but the rich who see him lose their heads!"

Clicking her tongue incredulously Grandma stared at them.

"Do such strange things really happen? I've lived more than half a century, but I've never seen anything like that."

The militiamen were half convinced, and they began to comment among themselves: "No wonder the poor people all follow the Communists. They're protected by the gods! I think it's better not to go out at night. There's always the danger that we might bump into spirits."

"There are lots of soldiers and road-blocks in town, but you can't help feeling scared in the countryside."

"Haven't all the troops been pulled out of the county seat too? Even the chief of police has come to the countryside."

"The chief of police passed by here early this morning," interrupted the proprietress. "He was riding in a sedan-chair with a white awning and was escorted by two armed bodyguards. It was very grand."

"No matter how grand he is, he can't afford to meet the Communists," said a militiaman. "Ours is still the best job. We're far away from the Communists, there's no danger here."

"That's easily said, but if you let a single one of them through, the higher-ups will certainly make you pay for it."

The fellow who looked like their leader kept silent as he eyed Grandma's jewellery. Sidling up to her table, he struck up a conversation with her and pulling up a stool he said:

"You ought to have a bodyguard with you. . . . This road isn't very safe, you know."

Grandma, waving her fan, told him to sit down and called for another bowl of tea.

"Thank you, thank you . . ." the other replied ingratiatingly. "I won't have any, thank you. . . . Don't worry, I'll tell two men from the road-block to accompany you to town."

The breeze brought with it snatches of folk songs. Little groups of people appeared in the distance, and gradually came nearer. They looked like roving peasants in search of work — a sight not uncommon during the busy farming season. But their bearing seemed somehow different.

"There's trouble brewing today!" said a militiaman, backing into the teahouse.

More militiamen scurried in muttering among themselves: "Don't let's ask for trouble. Look, another bunch is coming down the road!"

"It certainly looks like trouble."

"Nonsense!" said their leader. Watching the old lady drinking her tea, he whispered to a militiaman: "See that golden bracelet of hers? I'll bet it weighs a couple of ounces! Get her to come to the road-block and we'll relieve her of its weight!"

Turning to Grandma, he said: "Do you see what's happening, old lady? Things look bad!"

"Oh!"

"Don't be frightened. All the fellows here will protect you! I'm not afraid, not even of Two-gun Grandma," he boasted more and more loudly. "I'm only waiting for the chance to

catch Two-gun Grandma and get the reward. Ten thousand silver dollars must make a pile as high as this table!"

"Much more than that!" Grandma chuckled. "Do you think I'm worth so many silver dollars?"

"Uh-uh! That's carrying the joke too far, old lady." He continued in a coaxing tone: "... it's rather dangerous at the moment. You'd better come into the road-block with us, and I'll get someone to escort you to town."

"Fine," agreed Grandma with a smile. "I'll go when I've had some more tea."

Groups of young peasants walked casually past the teahouse, crossed the stone bridge and dispersed on both sides of the highway.

One large group stopped to drink cold water from the well nearby and to rest, they talked to each other in low tones. The atmosphere around the teahouse became somewhat strained, and even the talkative proprietress was silent.

The leader of the militiamen fidgeted on his stool, then got up and slipped away.

"Let's have some more boiling water," called Grandma. With a friendly smile she asked the proprietress who brought it, to sit down at her table. She evidently wanted to ask her some questions.

At this juncture, a sedan-chair carried by swiftly striding bearers and followed by two heavily-armed bodyguards stopped at the door.

"The chief of police!" exclaimed the proprietress, hurriedly getting to her feet. The police chief, dressed in a khaki uniform, dismounted from the sedan-chair and looked with annoyance at the deserted road-block on the bridge. He stamped his foot and shouted:

"Where have those oafs on the road-block gone?"

The militiamen scampered out of the teahouse and saluted respectfully.

"If you let one Communist through, I'll have the lot of you shot!"

"Yessir, yessir!" said the militiamen, saluting and shrinking back fearfully.

The bodyguards brought a chair for the chief of police and the proprietress set a bowl of brick-tea before him.

"Bring me a bowl of rice wine," he ordered, "I hear it's very good here."

The chief of police caught sight of Grandma's sedan.

"Who does that belong to?" he asked admiringly. "What fine fittings!"

The proprietress, who was preparing his rice wine, replied: "It belongs to the old lady at the next table."

The chief of police turned to look at Grandma who was sipping her tea. Amazement spread over his features, he jumped to his feet, and his chair overturned with a crash.

"You . . . Two-gun Grandma?!"

Grandma looked up and said graciously: "What a poor memory you have, chief of police. Didn't you recognize me?"

She beckoned to him with her fan, but the chief of police shrank back. Several figures closed in from behind, and cut off his escape. He could almost see the two loaded pistols under Grandma's white silk jacket. With a slight motion, she could shoot him through the head! He looked around and saw only strange faces. A cold sweat broke out on his forehead. Then with shaky knees and a sickly smile he bowed and scraped towards Grandma.

"You personally passed the death sentence on me, remember?" said Grandma. "When I escaped from prison on that rainy night three years ago, you and your men chased me nearly twenty miles!"

Grandma pointed her fan at the police notice pasted to the door of the teahouse.

"I see you want to arrest me again. Well, today I've come in person to give myself up and collect the reward. What are you going to do with me?"

"No! No!" said the desperate chief of police. The tables had turned since that stormy night three years ago, when

Grandma had been alone and defenceless. Today she was Two-gun Grandma with a guerilla detachment at her back. The chief of police stood there and quavered: "That . . . that . . . was . . . was a misunderstanding. . . ."

"Misunderstanding? Why did you offer a reward of ten thousand silver dollars? Do you mean to say that you don't want all those lovely shining coins?"

The chief of police remained silent. Sweat poured down his face and his lips were blue.

Some guerillas in peasant garb relieved him of the guns on his belt. His two bodyguards and the militiamen had already given up their arms and ammunition.

"Why did you come here?" asked Grandma.

"I beg to report . . . the Second Department in Chungking sent men . . . to arrest a woman Communist . . . called Chiang Hsueh-chin. . . . This afternoon a special lorry . . . is taking her back . . . it's nothing to do with me. Vice-Director Shen Yang-chai . . . of Southwest Special District is personally in charge . . . I . . . I've been ordered to . . . inspect the highway patrols . . . !"

"Take him away!" Hua Wei ordered. The guerillas took the chief of police together with the militiamen to a room in the back of the teahouse. Hua Wei followed them.

After a while, several guerillas in militiamen's uniforms emerged. Grandma remained seated. She sipped tea and watched Hua Wei go with them towards the bridge.

From the hills came the sound of an axe tapping on wood — the pre-arranged signal.

A few minutes later they heard the motor of an approaching vehicle, and a ten-wheeled military lorry sped along the road, soon reaching the bridge. The disguised guerillas lined up across it, blocking the way.

"Halt for inspection!"

The lorry came to a stop, but kept its motor running. An officer, his cap bearing the Kuomintang emblem of a white sun on a blue background, stuck his head out of the driver's cab and barked:

"This is a military vehicle of the Southwest Bureau. Who dares to inspect it?"

"I say halt for inspection!" Rifle bolts clicked.

"Damn you!" Shutting off the ignition, the officer jumped out.

"Are you blind, you bastards!" he swore.

"Spawn of a turtle, it's you who are blind!" said the guerillas, disarming the officer and pinioning the driver. Hua Wei tossed aside the cap he was wearing and tore off his militiaman's jacket, revealing his red armband. "Do you see this?"

The enemy soldiers riding on the lorry meekly surrendered their brand-new American weapons. A plainclothes agent who was among them jumped out of the back of the lorry and scuttled down the road, trying to escape by way of the river.

"Stop!" Hua Wei shouted. He was about to fire, when another guerilla sprinted forward, grasped the fleeing agent by his hair and dragged him back. Hua Wei looked into a familiar face, now ashen with fright.

"Fu Chih-kao! Traitor!" he shouted, his face darkening.

Quaking from head to foot, Fu Chih-kao advanced a few steps, then his knees gave way. . . .

The guerillas searched the lorry. Sister Chiang was not there. . . .

Grandma was standing at the end of the bridge, sharply interrogating the officer.

"Who are you?"

"Major Wei Chi-po," replied the officer.

He glanced worriedly at the set faces around him, still trying to maintain an insolent front.

"Where is Chiang Hsueh-chin?" asked Grandma in a voice hard with rage.

"Talk!" thundered the guerillas.

The secret agent obstinately refused to open his mouth.

Eyes red with anger, Grandma swept aside her silken jacket, and whipped out a pair of pistols. She pointed them unwaveringly at the chest of the petrified secret agent. Wei Chi-po stared fearfully at the black muzzles. Pale as a sheet and with knees shaking uncontrollably, he stammered: "I . . . I'll . . . talk. . . ."

Wei Chi-po suddenly caught sight of Hua Wei and a glint of recognition appeared in his terror-stricken eyes.

"Talk!" Grandma's guns twitched as her fingers tightened around the triggers.

"Yest . . . yest . . . yesterday at midnight . . . Vice-Director Shen Yang-chai . . . changed his plans at the last moment. He took Chiang Hsueh-chin himself . . . to Chungking . . . secretly by boat last night. . . ."

"What?" Grandma's face paled. Hua Wei raised his gun and bellowed: "After them!"

15

ANOTHER dark night descended on Chatzetung. The wind was damp and chilly.

In every cell, the inmates were crowded up to the grating, listening intently to the stream of raucous shouts issuing from the interrogation cell. Grotesque shadows flitted on its walls, which were lined with instruments of torture.

Anxious whispers were heard at the cell doors.

"Another midnight inquisition!"

"Both Hsu Peng-fei and Chu Chieh have come!"

"Who's going to be questioned?"

"Maybe Lao Hsu."

Hsu Yun-feng was standing at the iron door of Cell 8. Yu Hsin-chiang could see his troubled face outlined by the dull prison light.

Perhaps it was to be Sister Chiang again? Yu Hsin-chiang suffered for her. She had been brought to the camp after Lung Kuang-hua's memorial service and had been tortured so often that she was nearly always unconscious. The prisoners had lost count of the times she had been taken out for questioning. They knew how much she was enduring in order to protect the Party. They respected her for it and realized that she was also suffering because of their own activities. The enemy had been forced to accept their terms and stop persecuting them after the hunger strike, but it was obvious that they were now venting their spleen by torturing Sister Chiang. This deeply distressed and angered the prisoners.

"The Owl and the Bear are going to the women's cells!"

Yu Hsin-chiang strained his eyes, but in the dim light shed by the bulbs he could not see anything.

"Who did they take away?" someone inquired.

"Chiang Hsueh-chin!"

"Look, she's coming out!"

Sister Chiang again. A leaden weight seemed to press on Yu Hsin-chiang's heart.

An oppressive silence fell over the cells.

After a while the savage shouts and brutal laughter of the inquisitors broke the deathly silence.

"Will you talk or not? I say, will you talk or not?"

A steady and fearless voice replied: "I know the names and addresses of my leaders, and I also know the names and addresses of my subordinates. These are Party secrets. You'll never get anything from me!"

Her firm answer reminded the prisoners of the day when Sister Chiang had been brought to the camp. She had smiled at them, and her whole bearing had expressed her confidence in victory and her unbending resolution. They could almost see her standing in the torture cell with her head held high, facing the baffled enemy. Perhaps Sister Chiang's reply had compelled the agents to reconsider their tactics, for no more voices were heard. . . .

The anxious comrades in Cell 7 resumed their conversation.

"It's the work of that dirty traitor Fu Chih-kao again," Yu Hsin-chiang swore. "Was anyone else arrested in northern Szechuan besides Sister Chiang?"

"No, she was the only one."

"I hear that the Mount Huaying detachment tried to rescue Sister Chiang on the highway, but those crafty agents brought her back by boat at night. . . ."

Someone sighed regretfully.

The sound of voices and of Hsu Peng-fei's laughter came from the torture cell.

"Don't think we can't tame a mere woman Communist! If you don't want to talk, all right, we'll help you open your mouth. Tie her up!"

More savage yells.

The night dragged on endlessly through hours of pain and suffering, until finally the stars paled and the cocks began to crow.

Sister Chiang was no longer silhouetted against the blood-stained wall. She had been hung head down from a beam in the ceiling.

"Will you talk now?"

Grotesque shadows danced on the walls.

"No." Her voice was weak, but as calm as ever.

"The nerves of the fingertips are linked with the heart, so think it over!"

"Will you talk?"

No reply.

A hammer was raised, throwing a heavy black shadow on the wall.

"Drive it in!"

The inmates visualized tightly bound hands, the bamboo splinter piercing a fingertip . . . blood spurting. . . .

"Will you talk?"

No reply.

"So you won't talk? Pull it out! Drive it in again!"

No sound came from Sister Chiang in spite of the excruciating pain. The inmates felt as if the bamboo splinter had been driven into their own hearts. . . .

Water splashed.

"Revive her! Drive it in again!"

From the frantic note of Hsu Peng-fei's shouts, the prisoners knew that the enemy could get no more from Sister Chiang, a woman Communist, than they had from Lao Hsu. The traitor Fu Chih-kao had told them that Sister Chiang had been secretary of the Shatse district committee, that she had probably assumed an even more responsible position in the countryside, and that she knew a great deal about the underground Party organization which they were eager to learn, but their most cruel tortures had failed to make her disclose anything.

One splinter after another was driven deep into her flesh. The left hand, then the right. Both hands were bristling with long, jagged splinters.

Again and again water splashed.

Hsu Peng-fei's bellows were no longer heard, nor was there a single moan from Sister Chiang. The prisoners pressed against their cell doors and stood there motionless.

> Locked fast, the gate for men;
> Wide open, the hole for dogs.
> A voice shouts:
> "Crawl out and have your freedom!"
> I long for freedom, but one thing I know —
> Men must not crawl like curs. . . .

As Liu Sze-yang listened to the low strains coming from a cell downstairs, he wondered who was singing so early in the morning. A chill wind blew on his face. He had been standing by the door a long time. His eyes wandered to the distant hills, where the withered grass of late autumn gleamed yellow in the beams of the rising sun. The leaves had fallen from the sparse trees, leaving the branches bare. Only the machine-guns on top of the wall, the cold gleaming bayonets and the close-strung barbed-wire fences were unchanged. . . . The song and the scene before him filled Liu Sze-yang with a creative fervour.

He hurried to his pallet and from a niche in the wall drew out a pen carved from a strip of bamboo. Lying on the floor, he dipped the pen in some ink made from charred cotton, and opened a notebook bearing the inscription "Verses from the Barred Window." They were short poems which he had written since coming to the concentration camp. He filled another page with angry, passionate lines.

"Sister Chiang is coming back!" reported Yu Hsin-chiang. The prisoners rushed to the cell doors.

The iron gate in the prison wall was open. The Owl stepped into the yard, glared at the rows of cell and shouted: "Turn your heads away!"

Everyone ignored his orders. Standing on tiptoe, the prisoners peered out between the grating. After a night of torture, Sister Chiang came through the gate supported by two secret agents. She was only semi-conscious and dragged her feet helplessly. Splashes of blood from her torn fingers marked her path. The prisoners watched with bated breath, their eyes welling with tears, and fury smouldering within them.

A proud voice broke into song, and Sister Chiang gradually came round. She listened for a moment, then slowly raised her eyes to see where the voice was coming from. There, at the door of Cell 8, stood Hsu Yun-feng, watching her with eyes full of confidence and encouragement. A tremor ran through her. The meeting of their glances roused her last bit of strength and will-power. She tried to steady herself, swayed a little, and by a great effort finally managed to stand erect. Then she threw back her head and tossed the blood-stained hair from her pale face. With eyes unutterably wary, yet full of contempt, she looked at the agents supporting her, then shook them off as if their touch defiled her. Her head held high, she staggered unassisted towards the women's cells.

"Ah! Sister Chiang!" exclaimed the inmates.

She only managed to take a few steps before collapsing. Her dishevelled hair fell over her face, and blood bespattered her blue gown and red cardigan.

Several women prisoners rushed out and carried Sister Chiang gently into their cell. The door was slammed and locked behind them.

Throughout the prison her comrades thrust their heads through the door-holes and asked about her, but all that could be seen were shadows ceaselessly moving behind the bars of the women's cells.

"Those brutes! What have they done to Sister Chiang?" asked someone, furiously grasping the grating of the cell.

A bucket of mildewed rice was standing by the door of Cell 7. It was time for breakfast, but no one had any thought for food. Liu Sze-yang squatted on the floor. Never before

had he been so deeply moved. The verses flowing from his pen seemed to be written with tears and blood.

The prisoners crowded against the cell doors, anxiously asking:

"How is she? Is there any news?"

"They say she's fainted again. The women comrades are trying to bring her round. . . ."

One hour, two hours passed. Yu Hsin-chiang stood in the middle of Cell 7 and with profound emotion read the verses Liu Sze-yang had just composed:

Flaming irons sear our breasts,
Sharp bamboo splinters pierce each finger.
Icy water floods our nostrils,
Electric currents rack our bodies. . . .
In the evil flames of hell
Man is tempered,
Until his will
Becomes hard and bright as gold.
Our flesh may burn,
Our bones may break,
Yet iron rods
And wooden staves
Cannot pry open our lips.
For therein rests the safety of many comrades!
Rip open my breast with bayonets —
All you will find is a fiery red heart!

Everybody in the prison was deeply concerned about Sister Chiang. The women were especially worried and lavished the tenderest care upon her.

Sun Ming-hsia first washed the blood from Sister Chiang's fingers with salt water, then a cell mate handed her some cotton wool and a bottle of disinfectant and Sun Ming-hsia carefully swabbed the wounds. She found that the bamboo splinters had broken and left jagged fragments in the flesh. She carefully separated the lacerated flesh; and with tears in her eyes she plucked out the embedded splinters one by one. The wounds started to bleed again, and though she was unconscious, Sister Chiang's fingers quivered with pain. Sun Ming-hsia could bear the sight no longer and turned her head aside. . . .

"Keep a grip on yourself, Ming-hsia!" Someone took the bottle from her and then one by one handed her cotton wool soaked in disinfectant.

Sister Chiang was still unconscious. Her breathing was weak and her teeth were tightly clenched, as if to prevent herself from crying out. A tremor shook her body as the pad touched a deep gash.

"Gently!"

The hearts of her comrades ached for her. Sun Ming-hsia glanced apologetically at Sister Chiang, then clenching her teeth, again bent her head over her task. She thought of the time when Sister Chiang had first arrived at the prison. She had gazed into her own tearful eyes and said gently: "In times of trial, we must protect the integrity of the Party with our lives." When Sister Chiang had been taken out by the agents the previous night, Sun Ming-hsia had rushed to the door of the cell, shouting: "Sister Chiang! Sister Chiang!" Sister Chiang had stopped and turned around with a quiet, reassuring smile. Sun Ming-hsia would always remember the strength that her brief yet serene smile had given her.

"Is the fungus powder ready? Hurry!" urged Sun Ming-hsia when she had finished cleaning the wounds.

A small bowlful of greyish-white powder made from a kind of moss that grew in the prison yard was set on the pallet.

Sun Ming-hsia sprinkled some of it on Sister Chiang's fingers to stop the bleeding and then bandaged them deftly with cotton wool and strips of cloth.

After this was done, Sun Ming-hsia prepared to undo the band of cloth around Sister Chiang's arm which had served as tourniquet.

"Slowly, slowly," cautioned her cell mates, afraid that blood might rush into the wounds too fast and cause Sister Chiang sharp pain.

"Yes, I know," nodded Sun Ming-hsia. All eyes were watching Sister Chiang's face. Her eyelashes flickered, the corners of her mouth twitched, and her pallid cheeks became faintly

flushed. A deep silence fell on the concentration camp; it was so deep that even the ticking of the wall clock in the warders' office could be heard.

The last band of the tourniquet was loosened. Sister Chiang uttered a low moan. Her head rolled to one side in agony. Blood-flecked froth bubbled from her mouth.

"What's that?" exclaimed the other women prisoners in horror.

"Sister Chiang bit through her lips while she was being tortured," said Sun Ming-hsia.

Every eye was moist, as the inmates thought of the excruciating pain she must have suffered during the repeated interrogations. Despite her sufferings this woman Communist had calmly said to the enemy: "Victory will for ever be ours."

"Tell the men comrades that Sister Chiang is coming round!" said Sun Ming-hsia, taking her fingers from Sister Chiang's pulse and drawing up her quilt.

"Wouldn't it be better to put her pillow higher?" suggested Li Ching-chu who was lying on the other side of the cell because one of her legs had been broken by torture. Painfully raising herself on her hands she looked at Sister Chiang who had been her comrade-in-arms for many years.

"No, it shouldn't be too high," replied Sun Ming-hsia, looking at Li Ching-chu as if to say: "Don't worry, just lie down and don't tire yourself."

"Take a rest, Sun Ming-hsia. You're worn out," said Li Ching-chu.

"Never mind, I'm quite all right."

Sister Chiang's cell mates stood patiently at her bedside, waiting for her to regain consciousness.

"What makes her so firm?" mused Sun Ming-hsia aloud. The women turned to Li Ching-chu for an answer.

"Sister Chiang is an example to all of us," she said. Slowly propping herself up, she continued: "I've worked with her for a long time. Her father died when she'd only just learned to say 'dada.' Her mother had to support the family by borrowing, pawning and taking in sewing. When she was seven years old, her mother took her to Chungking because she'd heard that it was easier to make a living in the big cities. But in those days the warlords were always fighting, and famine was widespread. Driven by despair, her mother drowned herself in the river, and the abandoned child was put in an orphanage. It was a hard life. Her rice bowl was often snatched from her just as she raised it to her lips, but no one ever saw her cry. When she was barely nine years old, she became a child-labourer in a spinning mill. She worked for two years and was then kicked out because she was ill. . . ."

Li Ching-chu gazed at Sister Chiang with deep emotion. Ten years ago they studied and worked together. One scene in particular stood out in her mind: a sun-drenched valley, a sparkling mountain stream, a bamboo grove. Sister Chiang was gazing reverently at a red flag emblazoned with a hammer and a sickle. The valley echoed to her solemn pledge: "It is my desire to join the Communist Party of China."

"In the early spring of 1947," continued Li Ching-chu, "the Party decided to send a number of comrades to help support the armed struggle in the countryside. Sister Chiang and her husband Peng Sung-tao both volunteered. The Party approved his application, but asked her to remain in Chungking for a while. I went with Sister Chiang to the Heaven Worship Gate Wharf to see her husband off."

Li Ching-chu herself had left soon afterwards for the countryside, but had been arrested before she reached her destination.

"They say Comrade Peng was killed. Does she know?" asked Sun Ming-hsia softly.

"She does," Li Ching-chu's voice trembled with emotion. "She saw with her own eyes. . . ."

"Where's her child?" Sun Ming-hsia asked with concern. "Did she ever tell you?"

"A comrade is looking after him. He will grow up to carry forward our cause. . . ."

Li Ching-chu looked towards Sister Chiang. She now had a little colour in her face, but was still unconscious.

In the afternoon, the men prisoners turned out as usual for their exercise. Lao Hsu's suggestion had already reached every cell. He had expressed the hope that all the comrades would take Sister Chiang as their example and strengthen their revolutionary determination in this arduous struggle. The men took advantage of exercise time to send poems and messages to the women's cell, expressing their concern. They had seen her bear the brunt of the enemy's savage reprisals, and now they thought of her as the personification of the unyielding will of the inmates of Chatzetung. They knew that even cruel tortures can lose their effectiveness, and that Sister Chiang's firmness meant the frustration of the enemy's persecution. Sister Chiang's victory was everybody's victory!

Sun Ming-hsia stood by Sister Chiang's pallet and said: "Everyone please be quiet and listen!"

Sun Ming-hsia read aloud the contents of the letter she had just received:

> You are a stormy petrel,
> Winging through the darkness towards the dawn.
> Fly on! Fight on!
> For ever towards the rising sun,
> For ever with the Party!
>
> To Sister Chiang from Cell 4

"And here is an ode to Sister Chiang from Cell 6," said Sun Ming-hsia.

She read with increasing verve and enthusiasm. All eyes were intent on her lips, when Sister Chiang's voice broke in: "Ming-hsia, what are you doing?" Sun Ming-hsia cried joyfully: "She's come to!"

The women crowded solicitously around her bedside.

"How do you feel now? Is there anything we can do for you?"

Sister Chiang's eyes opened wide. She looked around and smiled.

Someone brought a bowl of water and urged her to rinse her mouth.

Sun Ming-hsia stood by Sister Chiang's pallet for a moment, not quite knowing what to do. Then she remembered the letters she was holding, and sitting by Sister Chiang, she said:

"All these letters were written to you by our comrades. I'll read them." Sun Ming-hsia picked one at random.

"This is from Cell 2."

"Cell 2? Isn't that the one where Comrade Yeh Ting used to be?" asked Sister Chiang. When Sun Ming-hsia nodded, a warm glow spread over her face and she asked softly: "What do they say?"

Sun Ming-hsia read:

> Dear Sister Chiang,
>
> More than a month of cruel tortures have proved your loyalty to the revolution. We know that torture is only effective with the weak and vacillating, never with a true Communist.
>
> When we are taken out for interrogation, when we force down our two meals of mildewed rice, when we are awakened in the middle of the night by the drumming on the bamboo clappers, when we hear the wind whistling down from Mount Kolo, we think of you, dear Sister Chiang!
>
> This is our pledge to the Party: We will never weaken before the enemy, never vacillate, never surrender. We will be as brave and strong as you.

One by one Sun Ming-hsia read all the letters aloud. Tears glistened in Sister Chiang's eyes, as she moistened her cracked lips with her tongue and said softly:

"How good the Party and the comrades are to me. What I have done is nothing! All honour belongs to the Party! We should all share the encouragement and strength extended by our comrades."

Sister Chiang was happy for more than one reason. She enjoyed her comrades' sympathy and support, she had successfully withstood torture, and last but not least, she had learned of Fu Chih-kao's fate while the agents had questioned her about the guerillas' activities. No more would that traitor sell out the Chungking Party Underground or the guerillas in the

countryside. This had made the exasperated enemy all the more anxious to pry some information out of her. But knowing that the Party was no longer in peril from him she had found it less hard to endure the enemy's torments.

The next letter was from Cell 7. Sun Ming-hsia glanced through it quickly.

"Cell 7 says that Comrade Hsu Yun-feng asks them to convey his greetings to you!"

Hsu Yun-feng!

Sister Chiang's eyes shone with tears. Again she saw her comrade standing at his door and giving her strength with his rousing song.

"Comrade Hsu Yun-feng, you are an example to us," she murmured, "we should all learn from you!"

"Sister Chiang, you are getting too excited. Take a rest."

"Why shouldn't I be excited? We have such a staunch Party here, and such splendid comrades!"

"Sister Chiang," asked Sun Ming-hsia softly, "is there anything you want? Ah, look, our baby is waking up."

"Yes, she really is awake," said Li Ching-chu. "See, she's watching us with her sweet little eyes."

Sun Ming-hsia picked up the baby they loved so much and took her over to Sister Chiang.

"You poor orphan," someone sighed. "Left without father and mother as soon as you were born. . . ."

"Don't be sad," said Sister Chiang, clasping the baby to her. "She is ours. We are her father and mother."

The baby cuddled against Sister Chiang, a smile on her sweet innocent face. She put her tiny thumb in her mouth and gurgled happily.

"Did her father and mother tell you their names?" she asked.

"No," replied Li Ching-chu regretfully. "They were only here a few days. We only know that they were brought from Kunming, but they didn't want to give anything away. Before the mother died, I asked her to tell me her name. She smiled and said, 'I'm a Communist.' "

"A Communist . . ." Sister Chiang's tears dropped on the baby's plump cheeks.

Li Ching-chu produced a crumpled bit of paper, saying: "This was left by the baby's father."

Sun Ming-hsia smoothed it and took it to Sister Chiang.

Sister Chiang looked closely at the barely legible writing. Softly and with deep feeling, she read:

> . . . so that the next generation will suffer no more,
> We are willing to sit here
> Until the walls of this prison collapse. . . .

She repeated these lines several times, then said at last: "Now I understand why Lao Hsu named the baby. . . ."

"Prison Flower! It's a beautiful name!" broke in Sun Ming-hsia.

"Prison Flower!" Sister Chiang's eyes shone, and in spite of the pain in her fingers, she hugged the baby tightly to her breast.

"Sister Chiang!" someone by the door called. "The comrades in the men's cells have been waiting since last night to hear from you."

Sister Chiang asked Sun Ming-hsia to help her compose a reply to express her gratitude for their concern.

Slowly she dictated the words, and Sun Ming-hsia took them down.

That night the note made the round of the cells by way of the secret crevices in the walls. It was passed from hand to hand and read under dim prison lights. Then the people sat in the dark, but her words were like sunshine in their hearts. She had written:

> Tortures are but small tests.
> Splinters are made of bamboo, but Communists
> have wills of steel.

16

THE days lengthened into weeks and the weeks into months. Autumn had come and gone, and winter was nearly over. The momentous changes in the national situation were clearly reflected in the struggles at the concentration camp. The courageous prisoners fought with increasing confidence and vigour, and the enemy's morale was sinking day by day.

Liu Sze-yang leaned against the open cell door and gazed into the distance, yearning for spring. A flock of chattering sparrows darted through the electrified barbed wire and were off again. He paid no attention to the warders who were fixing electric wiring along the corridors.

Prisoners strolled briskly about the prison yard, looking bright and cheerful. And over there was Sun Ming-hsia, a red ribbon in her hair and a bright smile on her lips. His heart surged with emotions.

"Are you thinking of another poem?"

Liu Sze-yang's thoughts were cut short.

"It's our turn for exercise. Come on, let's go!" cried Yu Hsin-chiang, dragging Liu Sze-yang by the arm.

They were smilingly greeted by groups of two's and three's gathered in the open doorways.

When they walked into the latrine, they saw that some of the men from Cell 5 were still there, talking in whispers. Their yard time had been over minutes ago.

"Why haven't you gone back yet?" Liu Sze-yang asked.

"We've discovered a new dodge!"

Everyone laughed. Big changes had been made in the prison regulations since the hunger strike; cells were no longer locked in day time and prisoners were allowed to go to the latrine

even after yard time. The agents seemed to have relaxed their surveillance somewhat, probably because of the rapid developments on the battle fronts during recent weeks. The Gorilla inquired after their health, pretended to be really concerned about them, and even announced that extra lights were to be installed in the cells for their comfort.

"Go ahead with your talk, I'll stand watch," said Liu Sze-yang stepping outside the latrine.

"We have a newcomer in Cell 5. He arrived yesterday after being arrested in Kweiyang. He has brought a lot of good news."

"What kind of good news?"

"He saw some newspapers at the Second Department."

"What did they say?"

"He's written it all out, and it's now in Cell 6," replied the prisoner, deliberately keeping them on tenterhooks. "You'll be able to read it in a while."

Liu Sze-yang coughed. A warder was coming.

"Tell us something now!" Yu Hsin-chiang begged.

The man from Cell 5 peered out of the door, then quickly said: "The Liberation Army is about to cross the Yangtze River!"

They could now hear the footsteps of the approaching secret agent. The speaker pulled a long face and sauntered out. Yu Hsin-chiang was furious. Why did that agent have to come just now, when they wanted to hear more about the good news! He caught sight of the Bear snooping around and snapped crossly: "Good dogs don't get underfoot! What cur is that blocking the doorway?"

The Bear wheeled round, but when he saw Yu Hsin-chiang he pretended not to have heard and slowly ambled away. During the hunger strike the agents had found out that this worker who had spoken for the inmates was not a man to be trifled with.

Victory, so close at hand, imbued the comrades with a sense of urgency and excitement. Pulling Liu Sze-yang along with

him, Yu Hsin-chiang hurried to the pool. He cupped his hands, let the cool sparkling water run into them and washed his face. The little pool had now been enlarged, and lined with stones so that it formed a small tank in which the inmates could do their washing. They no longer had to hunt for drinking water. Boiled water was supplied and vegetables were served at every meal.

Yu Hsin-chiang was in particularly high spirits as he returned from the yard that day. As he entered the cell, Liu Sze-yang beckoned to him with a nod. He had never seen Liu Sze-yang so happy before; there must be some good news. The prisoners were all crowded around Ting Chang-fa.

"Hush, not so loud!" said Ting Chang-fa, his face crinkling in a smile. "I have three important pieces of news for you. . . ."

In his hands were several sheets of paper, which had been passed on from Cell 6.

"Someone stand by the door and keep look-out for secret agents," he said as he raised his index finger and began:

"First, we've won the Liaohsi-Shenyang campaign. Four hundred and seventy thousand enemy troops have been put out of action! We've taken Changchun, Shenyang and Chinchow. The whole of the Northeast has been liberated. The details are all here, and you can read them for yourselves afterwards."

"Well fought! Splendid!" the inmates cheered, unable to restrain their elation.

"Second, we're doing well in the Huai-Hai campaign. Huang Po-tao, one of Chiang Kai-shek's army corps commanders, has been killed and Huang Wei, another army corps commander, has been taken prisoner. The army corps under Sun Yuan-liang has been smashed. The People's Liberation Army will soon be at the north bank of the Yangtze River, ready to drive south and liberate the rest of the country!"

"Hurray! Hurray!"

"Third, the Kuomintang is again asking for peace talks. . . ."

"Peace talks, my foot! Take Nanking first!"

"It looks as though the reactionaries are collapsing. We'll be free any moment now."

"Don't be so impatient," said Ting Chang-fa, clenching his pipe between his teeth. "Peace talks? I think there's something fishy here."

By this time, bursts of wild cheering were coming from upstairs, downstairs, and from the women's cells. The terrified warders were as quiet as mice.

"One more year of fighting at most and the reactionaries will be wiped out, and we Chinese people will be completely liberated," said Yu Hsin-chiang. "Ting Chang-fa, let's tell the news to Lao Hsu." He was worried that Hsu Yun-feng should be the only one not yet informed of these victories.

"Wait a moment. The Gorilla is talking to him."

"Oh, Gorilla's there? What does he want?"

"Who knows?" Ting Chang-fa shrugged his shoulders. "But you can be sure he's up to no good."

Liu Sze-yang broke in: "We should celebrate such wonderful news!"

All the others agreed.

"That's a good idea!" Elder Brother smiled at the happy faces around him. "What's the date today?"

"The twenty-ninth of December."

"Then let's get ready for a really lively New Year."

Elder Brother's words suggested jubilant victory festivities. Just as they were wondering how to celebrate someone coughed near the door. Everyone turned round. The Gorilla was coming out of Cell 8, an ingratiating smile on his face. He hurried by and a minute later his voice was heard in the yard:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said to the prisoners, "please be silent a moment. I have an important announcement to make."

"What's he up to now?"

"Let's hear what he has to say."

"I have just received a personal directive from my superior Hsu Peng-fei. The government has decided to discontinue the civil war and resume peace talks. All political prisoners are

to get better treatment. I have told Mr. Hsu Yun-feng about the changes. To my deep regret, there have been many shortcomings in the administration of this prison in the past. In order to improve your living conditions, and in compliance with my commanding officer's order, I announce the following: first, each person will be given four ounces of meat, half a pack of cigarettes and two ounces of wine for the New Year. . . ."

"Who cares about that? They've lost the war, and now they have the damned nerve to come begging for forgiveness!" said someone contemptuously.

"Second," the Gorilla's tone became even more unctuous, "during the New Year, yard time will be extended to the whole day, and doors will not be locked. Extra electric lights will be installed at once in every cell."

The Gorilla rambled on, but no one cared to listen any more.

"Do you think this is what the Gorilla went to tell Lao Hsu?" wondered Liu Sze-yang.

"Why should he tell Lao Hsu first?" wondered Yu Hsin-chiang.

"I'm sure our hunger strike frightened the Gorilla," someone asserted. "Why, the Bear quakes in his boots at the very sight of Liu Sze-yang and Yu Hsin-chiang!"

"It's not that simple. We'd better wait and see before drawing any conclusions."

"In my opinion, we have the victories of the People's Liberation Army to thank for all this!"

While they argued, Elder Brother listened, tugging at the tuft of hair behind his ear. Finally he said: "I think Ting Chang-fa is right. There's more to this than meets the eye. . . ."

Elder Brother did not make any further explanation, but it was obvious that he was turning something over in his mind. . . .

"Never mind what the enemy wants to do," said Elder Brother, changing the subject. "Let's think up New Year couplets!"

The inmates agreed that it would be a good plan to paste couplets on the cell door, though composing them would not be easy. The couplets would have to be vivid and to the point, and at the same time contain a hint of an underlying meaning, which the comrades could immediately grasp, but the enemy would not understand. Someone explained the way to compose the couplets and everyone began cudgelling his brains.

"I suggest that Liu Sze-yang start the ball rolling!" someone proposed.

"Why me? Elder Brother gave this job to all of us!"

"He did, but you're the poet, aren't you?"

Everyone grinned. Liu Sze-yang knit his brows, but nothing came to his mind.

"I'm no great shakes as a poet," said Yu Hsin-chiang in his straightforward manner. "But here goes: Two windows to let out fume, one hole to raise our heads through!"

The others were laughing before he had finished.

"What kind of couplet is that?"

"I think it's good. There's some truth in it!" nodded Ting Chang-fa with a laugh.

"It's original, to say the least," Liu Sze-yang agreed. "That will do for the vertical scrolls, but what about the horizontal one to go across the top of the door?"

"I've got it," said Ting Chang-fa, taking the pipe out of his mouth.

"Listen, how's this: 'Happiness within'?"

The other prisoners rocked with laughter.

"That means finding happiness in suffering," said Ting Chang-fa with glee.

"Happiness within! Then why did you trouble to escape from prison more than a dozen times?" somebody joked. Ting Chang-fa had never kept his past a secret, and his name was a household word with the peasants of western Szechuan. He had eventually been captured after being severely wounded while leading an armed peasant uprising, and brought to Chatze-tung. Ting Chang-fa replied with a chuckle:

"If I hadn't legged it, they'd have chopped my head off!"

"Then why don't you run away now?"

"Village and county lock-ups are a different proposition from this camp," laughed Ting Chang-fa. "There you just lean on the walls and they fall down. Any fool can get out. It's different here, with iron bars on every window."

"Didn't you say that if you put some burning tobacco on your leg irons and blew on it through a bamboo tube, the metal would become brittle, and all you'd have to do would be to snap them apart some dark night and be off?"

"Leg irons and window bars are all made of iron, aren't they?" someone teased him.

"That's right!" added Liu Sze-yang with a grin. "And didn't the Gorilla just say that he was going to issue cigarettes?"

"If we want to get away from this place," Ting Chang-fa waved his empty pipe, "all of us must heave together. One, two, three. . . ." He gestured to make his meaning clear, then stuck his beloved pipe back between his teeth.

"Well, I won't have to suck air for once," he continued. "It's about time my little pipe had a treat!"

A roar of laughter greeted his remark.

"You've been puffing at that empty pipe for more than a year. Now your hardships are over!"

"I always knew the day would come!"

His cell mates rocked with laughter.

The couplet having been decided upon, they continued to make plans. Someone suggested an exchange of presents between the cells. Elder Brother thought for a moment and then approved.

"I think we should give something of special significance to our staunchest fellow fighters, especially Lao Hsu and Sister Chiang," said Yu Hsin-chiang.

"What do you mean?" someone asked.

Yu Hsin-chiang opened his hand and handed Elder Brother a little red star which he had carved out of a plastic toothbrush handle. "Look at this! What do you think of it?"

"Give me one too, Yu Hsin-chiang," all the other prisoners clamoured. "How many have you made?"

"Ten."

"Not nearly enough!" said the others. "Make one for each of us. Everybody deserves one!"

"Yes, everyone should have one, but there's neither the material nor the time to make so many."

"Let everyone help! We'll get them done in time! Bring out your material!" urged Ting Chang-fa. As he spoke he wrenched a nail out of the floor. "I'll grind myself a tool to carve stars with."

Elder Brother smiled, and held a whispered conversation with several of the others. During exercise time that afternoon, Cell 7's proposal for a New Year celebration and all the arrangements in connection with it were made known to every cell.

The awaited day came.

The women were singing before the sky had scarcely brightened. The other cells joined in, and soon all the prisoners were spiritedly singing song after song.

The New Year celebrations had started.

Exchange of presents came next. Each prisoner had prepared a little keepsake for someone else, whether he knew him or not. Most of the gifts were "New Year cards" made out of squares of lavatory paper. They were decorated with a red star or a hammer and sickle painted with mercurochrome, and bore a few words of encouragement. Working day and night, Cell 7 had produced more than a hundred shining red or yellow stars, and they were now distributed among the other prisoners. The women presented each cell with a banner embroidered with coloured threads that had been unravelled from their stockings.

The third item on the programme was pasting up couplets at each cell door. All the scrolls had been pieced together out of lavatory paper. The characters had been written by many

different hands, so that they showed the skilled strokes of the practised, as well as the cruder scrawls of the less experienced. Even Prison Flower had contributed, her tiny hand guided by Sister Chiang.

The couplets abounded with revolutionary optimism. The one over the women's cell said:

Only months we've been in this cave,
While outside millennia have passed.

Everyone understood. The thousands of years of feudal rule were ending, and the era when the people were their own masters was at hand. "While outside millennia have passed" signified the rapid development of the earth-shaking revolution!

They also pasted a scroll across the top of the cell door:

Heaven and earth turning upside down.

Perhaps the Gorilla could not read; maybe he could but was afraid to let on. Anyhow, he grumbled: "This couplet has the flavour of someone seeking immortality."

The couplet of Cell 1 upstairs was written even more profoundly.

Truth is learnt at Koloshan,
Chatzetung is a place for meditation.

Over the top of the door appeared another line:

World of Perfect Bliss.

This, too, everyone understood: Truth meant revolutionary truth, and meditation meant learning Marxism-Leninism! The "world of perfect bliss" was the happiness at heart once the revolutionary truth was grasped. . . .

The Gorilla raised his eyebrows as he commented begrudgingly: "Still more about immortals."

On the upper level, the vertical scrolls on Cell 2 were also well written:

Within the cave the same old world,
Outside the window it is spring.

The one across the top read:

Bitterness ends, sweetness begins.

The couplet on Cell 3 was taken from an ancient poem. It read:

With so much spring in the garden, how can it be contained?
A spray of red apricot blossom has already reached over the wall.

And across the top:

Spring has returned to the land.

One couplet after another expressed this kind of veiled optimism and humour.

The Gorilla stood in front of Cell 7 and laboriously read: "Two windows — to let out fume, one hole — to raise our heads through!" Then he fixed his eyes on the scroll across the top of the door which read "Happiness within." Without waiting for him to speak, Yu Hsin-chiang inquired:

"Hey! Isn't this really the way we live here?"

"The way you live? Of course . . ." replied the Gorilla with some uncertainty. "But I think the word 'happiness' used here is provocative."

"Then we'll change it to 'bitterness.' What do you say to that?" Ting Chang-fa jokingly retorted.

The Gorilla pretended not to have heard him, and slipped away.

It was almost time for the celebration performances to begin. Everyone surged out together to luxuriate in the freedom and felicity of this moment won for them by the victory of the Party and the steady advance of the PLA.

An extra row of machine-guns were emplaced on the high wall. This was the agents' way of greeting the prisoners at the New Year, while the Gorilla and Owl retired to their offices and shut the doors tight.

Yu Hsin-chiang left his cell and glanced fervently at Cell 8. He did not run over to look for Lao Hsu, because Elder Brother had instructed him that they continue to be on guard though

victory was approaching, and not allow the enemy to catch on to what they were doing. He saw the crowd of people surging towards Lao Hsu's cell. Enthusiasm and concern showed in the eyes of all as they looked at Comrade Hsu Yun-feng, who stood at the door of his cell, his face radiant.

"Lao Hsu!" came the voices of the comrades below.

"Hello there, Lao Hsu!" came a crisp clear voice from the women's cell.

"Lao Hsu! Lao Hsu! Hello there!"

The voices came in waves from all directions like a surge of electricity conveying everyone's feelings for Lao Hsu.

Lao Hsu squeezed his way through the crowd of smiling people milling about in front of Cell 8 and reached the railings of the veranda, his leg-irons clanging behind him.

"Happy New Year, comrades!" said Hsu Yun-feng, holding on to the railings. His face was turned to the brightness of the sun and he was waving to the crowd.

"Happy New Year, Lao Hsu!..."

"Comrade Hsu Yun-feng, we have come to pay you our New Year's respects!"

There was again the hubbub of voices as Hsu Yun-feng raised his clasped hands and shook them to greet back.

"Comrades! My New Year's greetings to you! I pay you my respects!"

Someone had found a battered brass basin. Bong! Bong! The signal sounded for the start of the performance. The hum of the crowd and the banging on the brass-basin gong intermingled and reverberated through the air. Hsu Yun-feng raised his hands.

"The performance is about to begin," he announced. "Everyone should go and watch it."

The gong was hurriedly struck again and the performers from Cell 1 stepped forward.

Several comrades wearing leg-irons started dancing the *yangko* on the wind-swept ground, their heavy chains clanging away in accompaniment to their dance. The performance

made a mockery of the powers of darkness. Look! What performance could compare with this dance for fearless defiance!

Hsu Yun-feng's face was a picture of ecstasy as he raised his hands high and clapped loudly. A thunder of applause followed that filled the small yard.

This enthusiastic response greeted the finale of Cell 1's performance and was sustained until the beginning of the next. The crowd seethed back and forth and the yard suddenly became an open-air stage. Yu Hsin-chiang, absorbed in the exuberant festivities, was caught unawares by the warm greeting of a hand clapped on his shoulder.

"How are you, Hsiao Yu?*"

Turning to look, Yu Hsin-chiang could not help but cry out: "How are *you*, Lao Hsu?"

The two pairs of eyes met warmly. Although Lao Hsu and Yu Hsin-chiang were separated only by a wall, and could see each other daily besides having secret contacts, they had never enjoyed such freedom in public. Yu Hsin-chiang was aching to speak. He was about to say something when he noticed out of the corner of his eye a newly installed wire near the railings and swallowed back the words on the tip of his tongue.

Amidst the acclamations of the audience, both stood close to the railings. Lao Hsu placed his arm on Yu Hsin-chiang's shoulder so that Yu could lean against his chest.

"Hsiao Yu, why don't you speak?"

Yu glanced at the wire and said in an undertone: "Those agents have installed recorders everywhere."

"Those recorders are not recording any more," Lao Hsu smiled as he closed two fingers to indicate that the wire had been cut.

Yu's surprise showed in his rounded eyes. He smiled knowingly, relaxed and said:

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* Hsiao, literally "young" or "small," put before surnames as a sign of endearment.

"Lao Hsu, do you see that mountain in front of us? On the other side of that mountain flows the Chialing River. To the left is Tsechikou, and further to the left, there, where you see smoke rising, there are the chimney stacks of the factory. . . ."

"Yes, you mean the iron and steel mill."

"I know the lay of the land like the palm of my hand, and also that there's a Party branch in that factory." Yu Hsin-chiang's voice fell even lower. "You get to that iron and steel mill, then cross the Chialing River. . . ."

Hsu smiled and whispered into Yu's ear: "Do you see the pillboxes on the hills, and the rows and rows of electrified barbed wire all around this area? And there are hidden sentry posts. SACO has never known an escape."

"Now's the time for one. They don't lock the doors till fairly late at night. We'll all help you. . . ." Yu's gaze had never left Hsu's face. "It's too dangerous for you here!"

"Not yet," replied Hsu Yun-feng, confident that his analysis of the situation was correct. "They don't dare to kill me while they're still waging their peace offensive; as for a secret execution, they're reluctant to part with me for the time being. . . ."

Hsu was smiling as he said this. He knew that the enemy watched his every move. There was no chance to escape. If he should risk breaking out, it would alert the enemy and this would result in the needless sacrifice of the comrades. He whispered to Yu: "The enemy won't keep me here in Chatze-tung very long."

"Why not?"

"Do you think they'll rest easy knowing that I'm here with several hundred others?" Hsu Yun-feng gently patted Yu Hsin-chiang on the shoulder. "The sun is really fine today. Look how light-hearted the comrades are!"

The "announcer" for Cell 4 downstairs spoke with a Peking accent. "We'll do a song and dance number. It's time to begin!" The iron door swung open and a stream of somersaulting forms poured out. The audience cheered. Then the performers formed a circle. Some climbed onto the shoulders of

others until a human pyramid was formed, at the very top of which was a man whose face was wreathed in smiles. He stood higher than the yard walls, higher than the electrified barbed wire. In his hand was a red flag made of paper, which he waved towards the distant mountains. From all around slowly rose the song:

> The red flag, waving, waving,
> Wholehearted for revolution making;
> Muskets, homemade rifles sounding,
> Down with the local despots and bad gentry!
> . . . . . .

It was the favourite song of the local guerillas.

"A symbolic performance!" someone said softly.

"Yes, this is really great! See how high the human pyramid is!"

"Fine, fine! On with the show!" came the voices like repeated peals of thunder.

The frightened agents screwed up their courage and walked over. They could not help applauding and shouting their approval at such a spirited performance. Only the cunning and cruel Gorilla dared not show his face again.

"These celebrations were well prepared," Hsu Yun-feng said joyfully to Yu Hsin-chiang. "The memorial meeting was a review. This is another. It's also a rehearsal." Hsu was pleased in the belief that once the Party Underground outside and the Party organization in the prison established contact, the struggle here would develop even better. He asked Yu Hsin-chiang: "Have the passwords been relayed to the responsible persons?"

"Do you mean the secret password for contact with the Party Underground? Elder Brother has notified all the section heads. Sister Chiang and the other women already know."

His question answered, Hsu nodded his head. He wanted to continue but the roar of the audience made conversation impossible. The women comrades had come out in full force, and this performance promised to be even more exciting.

All were in elegant dance costumes of flowered sheets temporarily pressed into service for the occasion, the greens and reds providing a riot of colour. Sister Chiang was there, walking beside Li Ching-chu, who was using a stick. Sister Chiang wore a clean blue gown over which she had slipped a red cardigan. Her wan face bore the trace of a smile and was slightly flushed, her cheeks betraying the effects of the torture. Her emaciated figure belied the strength of her spirit and of her optimism. She hugged Prison Flower to her bosom.

"Sister Chiang has come!"

"Sister Chiang! Sister Chiang!"

The cries of welcome were like cheers for a winner.

Hsu Yun-feng waved his hand in salute, while Yu Hsin-chiang heartily applauded in greeting. This was her first meeting with her comrades-in-arms since her recovery from the torture, and the yard was astir with jubilation.

Hsu's slight smile added glow to the welcome. At the same time, he was thinking of taking this opportunity to talk more with Yu Hsin-chiang. Li Ching-yuan had said to him: "We will find a way to establish contact with you." This key sentence spoken in a split second and Lao Li's manner had been engraved in his heart all these months. He recalled Lao Li saying that long ago the municipal Party Underground committee had planned to send comrades through inside contact to work in the enemy organizations. If that plan had already materialized, there would be the possibility of establishing contact now. This thought filled Hsu Yun-feng with hope, knowing that the Party was deeply concerned about the comrades who had lost their freedom. He felt now that his fellow prisoners were assured of a bright future.

The clamour of clapping suddenly broke his train of thought. In the yard the women comrades, having circled round once, started to dance the *yangko*. Their colourful, swirling dance costumes were a delight to see. Amidst calls of bravo Yu Hsin-chiang, who was standing beside Hsu, clapped and cheered, carried away by the enthusiasm.

An ironic cry was heard over the laughter: "Who are those daredevils doing the *yangko* dance over there? Look out! Or you will be put on the blacklist and arrested!"

Someone else quipped back: "Not necessarily so. Even in Kuomintang areas, there are places where people can enjoy 'freedom.' Why, we have the freedom to dance the *yangko* here in their concentration camp!"

"Ha, ha, ha!"

As they danced, the women began to sing:

> Spring has come in January,
> Send the pigs and sheep away.
> Pigs and sheep,
> Where will you go? . . .
> To the brave PLA.

The faces of the special agents watching the women Party members' performance blanched with fear. Instantly, up on the high walls, they trained the machine-guns on the cheering people below.

Some comrades laughed. "What's the use of aiming? Chiang Kai-shek is too busy calling for a ceasefire to issue orders to shoot."

"This is really amusing," joked another. "While we sing and dance and hold our celebration we're provided with armed guards to guarantee our safety!"

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!"

Prison Flower, who had snuggled up to Sister Chiang, beamed on everyone with her sweet smile.

"Ha, ha, ha, ha!" Their laughter greeted the New Year of 1949.

"Lao Hsu!" said Yu Hsin-chiang after seeing the women's performance. Noticing that Hsu was lost in thought, he asked softly: "Are you worried that the Party Underground might not succeed in establishing contact with us?"

"No, not that," said Hsu shaking his head. "But a new batch of guards came day before yesterday. Are you aware of this?"

Yu Hsin-chiang nodded. "It may be too difficult for the Party Underground to establish contact with us. . . ."

"Difficulties do not faze a Communist."

Hsu's brow relaxed as he spoke softly to Yu Hsin-chiang, the noise of the crowd cutting out his voice to all others. "I was thinking of telling the comrades my estimate of the situation here."

"Oh!" Yu Hsin-chiang also spoke more easily: "Lao Hsu, let's hear what you think. I will remember it."

"I have seen the news written by Cell 5. This morning the Gorilla paid me another visit, especially to bring me a newspaper containing an item about Chiang Kai-shek's plea for peace. Chiang wants to preserve the phoney constitution, the reactionary armed forces and all that as preconditions for a ceasefire and peace talks. His precondition of retaining his armed forces alone shows clearly that the purpose of his plea for peace is to give himself a breathing spell to prepare for another round of fighting."

"We have also discussed this. The enemy's propaganda is nothing but delaying tactics."

"The Central Committee and Chairman Mao will completely shatter the enemy's political intrigues and wage the War of Liberation through to the end," Hsu said. After a pause, he continued: "What should occupy our attention now is the tactics of the special agents towards us. They have added a new wrinkle to the game. To all appearances, relaxation; in reality, quite the opposite."

Yu Hsin-chiang repeated the formula, posing it as a question.

"Think carefully," replied Hsu. "The enemy is now tackling us with double-faced tactics. It would seem that they have given in, declaring better treatment for us like leaving cell doors unlocked. This is all deliberate. What they're trying to do is to catch us unawares and ferret out clues of the Party set-up and secret activity in the prison. . . ."

This advice gave Yu the feeling that he had grown a bit wiser and a little more far-sighted. "Right. That's why they've

slipped these recorders in here to get our conversations down on tape. Elder Brother said the same, Lao Hsu," Yu Hsin-chiang recalled as he began to see the enemy's plan which at the time he had not fully understood. "He said that the recent abnormal behaviour of the enemy showed beyond a doubt that they've got a new scheme up their sleeve," Yu continued. "Two days ago, when we were preparing for these celebrations, Elder Brother sent an urgent message to all the cells. He said that everyone should participate in the festivities, which would at the same time be a review of our forces. He also warned the Party groups in the different cells not to expose themselves in any way. . . ."

"Elder Brother was right," Hsu Yun-feng nodded in agreement. "That is how we must deal with the enemy. The secret agents will use even more cunning ruses against us, but sooner or later they will give themselves away through their own stupidity!"

Yu Hsin-chiang laughed. His understanding was growing.

"Tell me, Hsiao Yu," said Hsu Yun-feng, "are we exposing ourselves by talking together like this?"

"Not at all!" replied Yu Hsin-chiang. "Our identities and relationship are known to everyone, and anyway, the enemy has always kept you under the closest observation. By drawing the enemy's attention to ourselves, we are diverting it from the comrades."

Yu Hsin-chiang seemed to feel the enemy's eyes on him. He pressed closer to Hsu Yun-feng and said with a grin: "They know I used to be your message bearer, but they wouldn't dream that I still am."

Hsu Yun-feng laughed. "Nevertheless, be very careful. From now on the enemy will keep you under even closer observation."

"Lao Hsu, you don't know how glad I am to be with you again."

"It makes me happy too. The news of the many victories is another reason for feeling happy. Our country will rise like a brilliant sun in the east and light the path to the future.

Let us be happy and confident. Come what may, our efforts, past and present, terrify the enemies of the people!"

The performance was drawing to a close and the last song was being sung, and Hsu Yun-feng joined in under his breath.

> Clouds cannot hide the sun
> Nor iron bars lock out the spring. . . .

"Lao Hsu, Liu Sze-yang wrote the words to this song only yesterday."

"They're good," commented Hsu Yun-feng. "After liberation it will be worthwhile collecting and publishing all the poems and songs written here."

Other comrades would have liked to spend a few moments with Hsu Yun-feng, but seeing him so deeply absorbed in conversation with Yu Hsin-chiang, they only looked on with smiles, unwilling to intrude. Sun Ming-hsia stood at the door of the women's cell with Prison Flower in her arms, and gazed at Hsu Yun-feng.

Yu Hsin-chiang called Lao Hsu's attention to the young girl.

Hsu Yun-feng's eyes lit up. "Let's go and see Prison Flower."

Picking up his leg-irons, he strode briskly down the stairs, followed by Yu Hsin-chiang.

Sun Ming-hsia came towards them, her eyes shining. Without a word, she held out the baby and thrust her into Lao Hsu's arms.

Hsu Yun-feng fondled her, and prodded the tender cheeks gently with his finger.

"She's smiling at you," said Yu Hsin-chiang.

Hsu Yun-feng gazed at the baby. "Say 'uncle.' "

Sun Ming-hsia couldn't help laughing. "She's only a few months old. She hasn't learned to talk yet!"

While the prisoners were celebrating, the Gorilla stayed in his office intent on his intrigues.

Anxiety weighed on his mind. The Special Adviser had completely reversed their methods of work since the hunger

By Wu Chiang-nien

strike, and had repeatedly told the Gorilla to ease up on the political prisoners. Although this stratagem might enable them to uncover underground activities, the Gorilla felt that it was nevertheless fraught with considerable danger. This open celebration and performance was a case in point. The political prisoners were a hive of activity, and such an open gathering could afford cover for underground work. Furthermore, the intense emotions displayed by the assembled prisoners frightened him, and in spite of the extra guards and machine-guns, he was worried that something might happen. He would never be able to disclaim responsibility. If things went on like this the political prisoners would be even more difficult to control.

"Operator! Operator! Get me Chief Hsu's home. . . . He's not in? . . . Put me through to Plum Garden, the American Advisory Department. . . ."

The Gorilla hurriedly reported what was going on and concluded: "They've been singing all the time and haven't stopped yet. . . ."

The sound of the singing coming through the window seemed like the roaring of thunder. Doubtless Hsu Peng-fei could hear it at the other end of the line. After a moment of silence the Gorilla heard his harsh voice asking: "Have you found anything suspicious?"

"The listening devices are out of order. We — we can't hear anything. . . . Yes, yes, sir, we'll send someone to repair them immediately. . . . Hsu Yun-feng and Yu Hsin-chiang are talking to each other. . . ."

Loud abuse came over the line.

"Yes — yes . . ." the Gorilla groped for his handkerchief and mopped the sweat from his forehead. "Yes — yes, Yu Hsin-chiang was his former message bearer. . . . Yes, yes, of course. . . . We — we will continue to keep them under observation."

The shouting from the other end of the line stopped for a moment, but Hsu Peng-fei had not hung up. The Gorilla was nervous and guessed that his information was causing serious

concern. He had stressed that the crowds going to Cell 8 to see Hsu Yun-feng made it difficult to keep a careful watch. . . . Still no words came through the phone. . . . Maybe the chief was asking the American adviser for help. The Gorilla held on to the receiver, not daring to put it down.

Ten minutes passed before Hsu Peng-fei returned to the phone:

"Yes, yes, sir . . . absolute secrecy. . . . Yes . . ." said the Gorilla, standing to attention before the phone. The worry on his face slowly dissolved into a cunning smile.

Early that afternoon all the cell doors were shut but not locked.

"These damned agents are scared!"

"They're up to some dirty tricks again!"

"Let them try it," said Ting Chang-fa, placing several packs of cigarettes his comrades had given him on his pallet. "I just saw the Gorilla. . . . But first let me have a smoke." He lit a cigarette and was just going to continue talking, when a comrade appeared at the door to say that someone had come from the women's cells.

Liu Sze-yang hurried to the door. There stood Sun Ming-hsia and two other women comrades. They had been out washing clothes when the cell doors were shut and had only just finished. With a smile towards Liu Sze-yang, Sun Ming-hsia shook open the wet laundry and hung out each piece to dry on the railings that caught the sunlight from the west. Sun Ming-hsia tugged at one of the shirts, then went back to the women's cells without turning her head.

"Let's go and hang up something too," Yu Hsin-chiang whispered to Liu Sze-yang, his eyes fixed on the shirt Sun Ming-hsia had indicated.

Liu Sze-yang understood. "I'll go and look."

He took some clothes his cell mates handed to him, rolled them up and soaked them with water.

Clutching the dripping bundle, Liu Sze-yang pushed open

the cell door. He almost bumped into the Bear, who was prowling about outside. Liu Sze-yang glared at him, and the agent disappeared down the stairs. Liu Sze-yang started to put up the clothes in front of Cell 8, then slowly moved towards Cell 7. When he had nearly finished, he shifted one or two items of clothing Sun Ming-hsia had left there. . . .

Back in the cell, Liu Sze-yang smoothed out the crumpled paper and glanced at it. Seeing that it was not intended for him, he thrust it back in his pocket, and after a while covertly handed it to Elder Brother, who read it and passed it on to Yu Hsin-chiang.

Standing at the window with his back to the others, Yu Hsin-chiang spread out the note and read:

"Tell Lao Hsu that the passwords correspond, and that contact has been made. Documents for study have been sent from home. Chiang."

Yu Hsin-chiang's hand trembled with joy. At last, they had got in touch as Lao Hsu had foretold! How many risks and how much effort this must have cost! By "home" Sister Chiang meant the Party Underground — their dear ones whom they had been waiting for night and day! Tearing the paper into tiny pieces, Yu Hsin-chiang put them in his mouth, chewed happily and finally swallowed. This day was indeed a day to rejoice.

From sunset till late night, Yu Hsin-chiang was in a fever of excitement. He was eager to rush over to Cell 8 and tell Lao Hsu the news he had been waiting so long to hear, but the opportunity did not present itself. The warders had been keeping him under close observation ever since the celebrations.

He finally dropped asleep determined to find some way of telling Lao Hsu early the next morning. On this chilly spring night, the prisoners were sleeping on their pallets on the floor, huddling close to each other for warmth. He longed for this cold night to be over and the warmth and light of the dawn to come soon.

Tap-tap, tap-tap.

Rapping on the floor from below woke the prisoners up.

"Hey, what's up? What's the matter?" someone crouched in the darkness and whispered to the comrades downstairs.

"Did you . . . see . . . ?" came back the muffled words.

Yu Hsin-chiang sat up. "What are they saying?"

"I can't hear clearly. . . . I think they said that someone's gone," replied Liu Sze-yang. Crouching over the floor again, he called out softly: "A bit louder downstairs, we can't hear you."

"What?" Liu Sze-yang's face could not be seen in the darkness, but the surprise and dismay in his voice were unmistakable.

"Say it again!" Liu Sze-yang called again.

This time the voice came clearer and everybody heard:

"Lao Hsu has just been taken away!"

"What?" Yu Hsin-chiang exclaimed, "they've taken Lao Hsu away? Why weren't the clappers sounded?"

"Everything has been quiet tonight. . . ."

"Where could they be taking Lao Hsu at such an hour?"

They lay huddled in the darkness, all thought of sleep gone. Apprehension froze every heart.

17

LONG tables with refreshments stood in the conference hall, and many of the chairs around them were already occupied. A press conference was to be held at the Southwest Bureau.

It was very cold outside. The forehead of the presiding Chief of the Information Department was moist, though not — as might be supposed — because of the braziers heaped with glowing charcoal. The truth was that he was nervous and had no desire to make any sort of statement to those Leftist journalists who had become so active during this awkward period of "peace talks." Circumstances, however, had left him no choice, and unable to find an excuse to put the thing off, he had to obey orders and go through with it. Luckily Hsu Peng-fei had promised to lend a hand, which quieted his misgivings to a certain extent. However, the time set for the opening of the conference had passed nearly an hour ago and Hsu had not yet shown up. He felt it would be undignified to wait any longer, so he decided to start. He intended to open with an important piece of news in order to attract the attention of the reporters present.

He coughed and stood up.

"Ladies and gentlemen!"

The laughing and chattering pressmen paid no heed, and even the reporters from the government news agencies seated in the front showed no great interest. Groups of reporters kept coming in late. The tubby Chief of the Information Department tugged at the tie which was too tight for his fat neck, bowed a smiling welcome to the late-comers, and waited till they were seated.

Among the new arrivals was Cheng Yao, who had changed her name to Chen Ching when she became a reporter six months ago. She dressed differently and had become wiser in the ways

of the world, but her eyes still shone with the same stubborn fighting spirit. She had been involved in a slight tussle before coming in to the conference. Comrade Chao, her superior, had decided at the last moment not to send her, for fear that her impulsive nature might get her into trouble. Cheng Yao, however, was not to be kept away. She was like a young stormy petrel, yearning to test its wings in the storm; like a soldier in the front line eager to hurl himself at the enemy. Her teacher and protector, Comrade Chao, had finally given way, but only on condition that she went as a silent observer and used the occasion to acquire some experience in legal methods of struggle.

"Today's press conference is very important," the Chief Information Officer went on. "It was personally arranged by my superior, General Chang Chun. This would have been his first opportunity to exchange opinions with the press since assuming his present post as Director of the Southwest Bureau, and he intended to reply to any questions you might want to put to the Government. Unfortunately, General Chang has been held up at the last moment by important official business, and he has delegated Hsu Peng-fei and myself to take his place here today."

He paused a moment, then began to read a written text, regardless of whether anyone in the noisy conference room was listening or not.

"The Government has repeatedly proposed peace talks between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party. The Generalissimo said long ago that the problem of the Chinese Communists could only be settled by political means. For this reason the Government is willing to begin talks at once on the eight terms* put forward by the Communist Party. The Government is sincere in its proposals. In his New Year's message, the Generalissimo stated: 'After the war against Japan I should not, as a faithful disciple of the Three People's Principles, have taken further military action to suppress the bandits. . . .' "

"Suppress the bandits?"

A reporter of the Central News Agency whispered a reminder: "Department Chief, don't forget that we're talking peace now."

"Yes, yes, of course," the Information Chief nodded and corrected himself. "That was a slip of the tongue, a mistake in terminology. We should of course follow Acting President Li Tsung-jen's speech. In the future, such expressions as 'suppressing the bandits' and so forth must be deleted from all newspapers and be replaced by 'civil war'. . . ."

There was a titter from the reporters.

"Such terms as 'Communist bandits' and 'traitorous Party' are to be strictly prohibited, and 'Chinese Communists' used instead. You are aware that for the sake of internal peace President Chiang has announced his retirement and relinquished the burden of presidential office."

One of the reporters chuckled and interjected in low tones: "The number one war criminal listed by the Communist Party naturally has to retire to run things from behind the scenes."

"Do you remember that fine description of him leaving Nanking? What a joke!" said Cheng Yao to her neighbour, quoting: "Dressed in a silken gown and jacket, the President expressed his great sadness at leaving this revolutionary capital beneath the Purple Mountains. Many of those seeing him off wore sad expressions."

A young reporter with an unruly head of hair laughed out loud:

"Probably that Central News Agency reporter was looking pretty sad himself."

This mention of the Central News Agency caught the ear of a woman reporter with blond curls and a flash camera suspended from her neck. This was Mary, a correspondent of the Central

* The eight terms were: punish the war criminals; abolish the bogus constitution; abolish the bogus "constituted authority"; reorganize all reactionary troops on democratic principles; confiscate bureaucrat-capital; reform the land system; abrogate treasonable treaties; convene a political consultative conference without the participation of reactionary elements; and form a democratic coalition government to take over all the powers of the reactionary Nanking Kuomintang government and of its subordinate governments at all levels.

News Agency. She could not see any of her acquaintances among the reporters and no one paid attention to her. She thought that the one with the gold-rimmed glasses was familiar but he didn't acknowledge her, so she had to turn around again and listen to the speech of the Information Chief.

"The Government has made many efforts during the past month to shorten the duration of the war and alleviate the people's sufferings. Acting President Li has already stated that talks will begin as soon as the meeting place has been decided on and the Communists' representatives arrive."

Today's reception was very different from previous press gatherings. The reporters who had formerly laughed and chattered noisily were now silent, while others who rarely spoke, were now quite animated. Mary turned her head angrily to see who was talking. She saw a self-assured young woman reporter and thought she must be less than twenty. What a fresh complexion she has, and how vivacious her big eyes are! Her hair was done in a simple but becoming style, that emphasized her youth. As Mary looked at her, she thought of her own fading charms, and a twinge of envy shot through her.

Sporadic clapping shook Mary out of her gloomy thoughts. The Chief of the Information Department had finished his speech.

"May I inquire if the United States supports the peace talks between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party?" a reporter asked.

"Of course," replied the Chief of Information Department with a smile. "Ambassador Leighton Stuart expressed public approval for them immediately after President Chiang delivered his New Year message. The ambassador said this was something for which he had always striven."

"The United States supported the Government in fighting the civil war, and it now supports the Government in holding peace talks. Won't this give ground for wild conjectures and doubts about the Government's sincerity?"

The Information Chief made no answer. Smiling fixedly,

and with eyes crinkled into thin slits, he looked around as if soliciting more questions.

Ignoring this hint, the reporter with the gold-rimmed glasses dropped two cubes of sugar into his coffee and slowly stirred it. The correspondents of the official newspapers held a whispered consultation. No one rose. Mary saw that things were not going well and was just about to go to the rescue when an even more tricky question was asked:

"According to reports, the Communist spokesman has said that the Government's peace moves are nothing but a fraud. He has accused the Government of being aided and abetted by the United States in all its actions. How should we understand this? How should we explain things to the public?"

"This question touches upon the strategy of the Government and our great ally; I'm not therefore in a position to reply. Nevertheless" — he hesitated and then plunged on — "the Government is free to act as it pleases, and you are at liberty to interpret the Government's actions as you see fit!"

With a sigh of relief, the correspondent of the *Central Daily* applauded this evasive reply.

Cheng Yao stood up, and asked bluntly: "Does that mean that newspapers have absolute freedom to print any news and commentaries they wish?"

Hand-clapping and laughter showed that many newsmen supported her.

"You are at liberty to interpret things as you like... but General Chang has been considering the question freedom of speech and the press, and he is drafting detailed regulations."

The Chief of the Information Department was at a loss to know how to continue, but at this difficult juncture Hsu Peng-fei strode noisily into the room.

"Hsu Peng-fei is here!" cried Mary with manifest relief. The correspondents of the official and semi-official papers livened up, but the majority kept silent, for although pressure had relaxed somewhat while "peace" overtures were in progress, the menace of the secret service continued.

As Cheng Yao sat down again, a reporter from the *Chungking Evening News* whispered to her: "The man who's just come in is Hsu Peng-fei!"

"Oh —" she turned to look at the new arrival.

"Chief Hsu, you've come just at the right time!" the Information Chief greeted him. "These eminent representatives of the press are all eager to meet you!"

"I'm deeply gratified to have the opportunity of getting together with the distinguished journalists," replied Hsu Peng-fei with nods and smiles towards the newsmen. He accepted the towel an attendant offered him, wiped his hands, and sat down stiffly beside the rotund Information Chief.

"I shall now proceed," said the Information Chief, who had recovered his pompous manner. "As you are aware, General Chang returned to Szechuan to take charge of the Southwest Bureau following General Chu's transfer to Fukien. General Chang has long been planning the future of the Szechuanese. The Hupeh Provincial Assembly, under the guidance of Commander-in-Chief Pai Chung-hsi, has recently issued a declaration on national affairs, proposing a fundamental change and the search for new courses. The same proposals are also likely to apply to Szechuan. Our province has been known since ancient times as a natural treasure-house, and it is a long way from the front lines. General Chang therefore strongly advocates that Szechuan be administered by the Szechuanese — that we practise regional self-government. His suggestion has the sympathy and approval of the Central Government. The prospects for Szechuan afford no cause for concern, regardless of how the peace talks turn out. All citizens of Szechuan should stand together, give of their best, and consider the building of a new Southwest as their personal duty. However, there have been some changes in the situation lately. Certain individuals with ulterior motives have taken advantage of the atmosphere created by the peace talks to spread dangerous rumours and make trouble. Some newspapers and publications are also ignoring our general interests, and the effects of their actions.

They have indiscriminately published statements attacking the Government and spread reports put out by the Hsinhua News Agency, thereby confusing public opinion and undermining morale in the rear areas. In its concern for the welfare of the whole nation, the Government cannot look on idly. If the circumstances call for it, the Government will take stern measures and severely punish the trouble-makers."

Mary was the first to respond. "I fully endorse the Government's stand!"

"My newspaper also expresses its support!" chorused the correspondent of the *Central Daily*.

Shouts of acclamation followed, obviously pre-arranged. After the clamour had died down there was a long silence, and just as the farce seemed to be drawing to a close, a succession of questions were unexpectedly fired at the platform. The atmosphere became charged with tension.

"May I inquire whether the Government intends to lay down in written form the extent of the freedom of the press?"

"Is not restricting the freedom of the press during the period of peace talks incompatible with the advance of democracy?"

"Our paper expresses profound regret over such restrictions and hopes the Government will reconsider the matter."

Hsu Peng-fei waggled his finger and the Information Chief hastened to say: "Ladies and gentlemen, please do not misinterpret me. Department Chief Hsu Peng-fei will now speak to us. Let us give him a good hand."

He started to clap but there was only a halfhearted response from the audience.

"News correspondents are the voice of the people, the uncrowned kings of public opinion," declaimed Hsu Peng-fei. "The freedom of the press is the quintessence of freedom and democracy in these new times. It is sacred and inviolable! Nevertheless, some of our friends here have gone to extremes. This may be due to the fact that journalists have contacts in many and varied quarters, and are therefore liable to be influenced by Communist propaganda. For this reason, news

correspondents are apt to vacillate and to have a few small doubts about the Government. Actually, General Chang's regulations on news reporting are the best means of guaranteeing the freedom of the press, and are not intended to impair this freedom in the least."

"Quite so. What Chief Hsu has said is entirely correct," agreed the Information Chief. "Today's reception proves this. Everyone is free to ask any question he likes!"

"There are many rumours to the effect that conscription will be expanded and that the arms works are working overtime."

"That is not so," said Hsu Peng-fei at once. "Since President Chiang's speech and message, arms production at the munitions plants has completely ceased and has been diverted to civilian purposes. It may be that extra shifts and hours are occasionally worked, but the output is of a non-military nature and devoted solely to the economic construction of the new Southwest. The situation in Szechuan has quietened down, and order has been restored in the factories. The students, understanding the sincerity of the Government, have gone back to their classrooms. The armed rebels in various parts of the province are being pacified. . . ."

"Would Mr. Hsu kindly inform us on conditions in the Huaying and Tapa Mountains?"

"It is reported that the Government is sending heavy reinforcements to Szechuan. Won't this affect the peace negotiations?"

"Reinforcements are being sent to northern Szechuan because small groups of armed Communists have been active there," Hsu Peng-fei readily answered. "The dispatch of the reinforcements is purely a measure of self-defence, and has no bearing on peace talks. You must be fully aware that the Government today is actually ten or twenty times stronger than the Communists in all fields, be they military, political or economic. The Government has the strength to determine either peace or war, and would be entirely justified in achieving peace

through military means. Its present proposals for negotiations are not due to weakness, but to desire to relieve the misery of the people. If the Communists make a peace agreement impossible by causing trouble and creating disorders in the Government's rear areas, the responsibility will not lie with the Government. Public opinion will know who is right and who is wrong. The people fully sympathize with the Government's intentions. As for the Communists' eight terms which stipulate the punishment of war criminals and so forth — the Government absolutely cannot accept them, nor should it be expected to do so!"

The Information Chief placed a bright red guest-list of those present in front of Hsu Peng-fei. Addressing the pressmen, he said: "We would like to have the pleasure of your company at dinner when this conference is over."

Hsu Peng-fei was glancing at the list when a woman's voice came clearly from the other side of the hall:

"Since the public can tell right from wrong, is there any objection to my paper publishing Mr. Hsu's speech in full?"

It was Cheng Yao, who had forgotten Comrade Chao's repeated injunctions and was unable to restrain herself.

"There is freedom of the press," replied Hsu Peng-fei. "But, each newspaper has the responsibility for its own actions and must accept the consequences." He glanced up and was struck by the poise and assurance of this young reporter.

"We will certainly carry the full text of this speech as delivered by you — the Government's official spokesman," said Cheng Yao. "I invite you to take a look at my notes. The press holds that the Government spokesman is responsible for the consequences of his declarations."

"Mr. Hsu's recent remarks seem to run counter to the spirit of the speech made by Acting President Li Tsung-jen. Will this prevent the full operation of Acting President Li's public order guaranteeing the freedom of the press and freedom of speech?"

"Mr. Hsu, do your remarks represent the present views of the Government?"

"Ladies and gentlemen," Hsu Peng-fei saw that the girl reporter had the support of her colleagues, and his smile became more reserved. "All remarks must be in accordance with Acting President Li's speech and the orders of the Government."

He had been prepared for some questioning from the radicals during this interview, but these reporters paid absolutely no attention to his veiled warnings and even dared to attack him in public. He was very angry at this and consulted the guest-list. The pudgy index finger of the Information Chief pointed to a name:

Chen Ching (female),
Correspondent of the *Shukuang Daily.*

His finger moved down the list stopping at a few other names.

Another reporter asked in a loud voice:

"May I ask whether Acting President Li's orders will be carried out in the Southwest?"

"Yes, of course they will," replied Hsu Peng-fei without hesitation. "It is the unshirkable duty of the Government to ensure their full implementation."

Several reporters jumped to their feet.

"When will the order for the release of political prisoners be put into effect?"

"The Government is making investigations. All members of the Communist Party will be released as soon as their identities are established."

The whole room quickened with excitement. The reporters whispered among themselves, and many raised their hands, each wanting to be the first to speak.

"Hsu Yun-feng, Chiang Hsueh-chin and Cheng Kang were arrested last year. If the Government wants to show its sincerity, why weren't they released immediately? It is hardly necessary to examine their identities. The Government long ago declared that they were important cadres of the Communist Party."

"Generals Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng* were imprisoned years ago. There is much concern as to whether they will be released or not. I hope the Government will live up to its word."

Hsu Peng-fei was obviously reluctant to speak on this subject, so the Information Chief came forward to answer.

"Acting President Li has already ordered the Air Force Headquarters to dispatch planes to Taiwan Province and Chungking to bring Generals Chang and Yang to Nanking for discussions on questions of national importance. Telegrams have also been sent to Governor Chen Cheng of Taiwan Province and Mayor Yang Sen of Chungking. They have been told to suspend surveillance at once and set them free at the earliest possible moment."

Hsu Peng-fei added: "This matter is in the hands of Mayor Yang Sen. If you have any questions or opinions, you may address them directly to the Mayor."

A reporter of the *Chungking Evening News* rejoined:

"The reporter of the *Shukuang Daily* has already interviewed Mayor Yang Sen and confirmed that Generals Chang and Yang are in the custody of the Military Information Bureau. He says that the local government has no say in this matter and that their release is a matter to be handled directly by Department Chief Hsu Peng-fei."

"If Generals Chang and Yang were in Chungking, I should

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* Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng were military commanders of the Kuomintang Northeastern and Northwestern Armies respectively. Influenced by the anti-Japanese national united front policy laid down by the Chinese Communist Party, they arrested Chiang Kai-shek in Sian in December 1936, and demanded cessation of civil war, unity with the Communist Party and joint resistance to Japan. This episode has become known as the "Sian Incident." Chiang was forced to accept the terms and was then set free to return to Nanking accompanied by Chang Hsueh-liang who, however, was detained by Chiang Kai-shek. Yang Hu-cheng was ordered to go abroad in April 1937 but he returned to China after the outbreak of the anti-Japanese war. He was then imprisoned and later murdered in a concentration camp on the eve of the liberation of Chungking in September 1949.

naturally carry out Acting President Li's orders and release them immediately. But. . . ."

"Chang Hsueh-liang is in Taipei, but it is well known that General Yang Hu-cheng is imprisoned in Chungking." Cheng Yao stood up and calmly extracted a newspaper from her briefcase. She held it aloft for all to see. "I'm sure that both Mr. Hsu and the Information Chief have read the news, published in our paper today, that General Yang Hu-cheng is being held in a secret prison near Tsechikou!"

Mary's voice broke the stunned silence: "How is it that none of us know about this?"

The correspondents of the *Central Daily* and other government papers shrugged their shoulders, as if they too knew nothing about it.

"Er — I have no knowledge of this either." Hsu Peng-fei frowned but then asked with a smile: "Has the *Shukuang Daily* checked the truth of its information?"

"Naturally."

"Does it come from reliable sources?" Hsu Peng-fei asked, still pretending to be pleasant.

"We have no right to disclose our source of information. One of the first principles of the ethics of our profession is to keep our sources of information absolutely confidential. My paper, of course, respects this principle."

"To the best of my knowledge, there are no secret prisons in the vicinity of Tsechikou," Hsu Peng-fei stated flatly.

His denial was greeted with angry shouts.

Cheng Yao continued: "We want to conduct an investigation at Tsechikou. Will the Government give us permission to do so?"

"Yes, let the Chungking Journalists' Association send representatives at once to look into the matter!"

"Hear! Hear!"

"Will Mr. Hsu please issue the passes immediately?"

"Quiet! Quiet, please! Let's discuss things properly," shouted Hsu Peng-fei who had not expected this young woman reporter to force him into such a position. He raised his hand, intending to end this battle of words as quickly as possible. The truth was that the Bureau of Confidential Information had already given him secret orders to tighten up surveillance over political prisoners, and he had only just sent an urgent telegram informing Nanking that the news of General Yang Hu-cheng's imprisonment in Chungking had leaked out. Mao Jen-feng had flown to Fenghua that very morning to get personal instructions from Chiang Kai-shek. When the hall had quietened down a little, he declared:

"I'm sorry, but I really don't know the whereabouts of General Yang Hu-cheng. As soon as this meeting is over I'll make immediate investigations and if I am successful in locating him I will invite you all to accompany me on a visit to him."

Mary led the applause.

The Information Chief took this opportunity to get on his feet and announce a ten-minute break.

Reporters from several independent newspapers continued to comment angrily. The man in the gold-rimmed glasses expressed strong disapproval of his colleagues, and said:

"The integrity of our profession rests upon the impartiality and fairness of our statements. News correspondents should refrain from radical utterances."

"The reliability and impartiality of your newspaper is well known," remarked a reporter of the official *Central Daily*.

The Chief of the Information Department approached and with a condescending air joined in the conversation:

"All of you here today are my colleagues. I made a special study of news reporting when I was at university in Europe and the United States. Reporting is an art which requires great skill."

Someone interjected: "The Information Chief's tongue is very skilled too!"

Some reporters from official papers burst out laughing.

Mary walked over to Cheng Yao. All signs of resentment had left her. She had reached the conclusion that Cheng Yao

was worth keeping an eye on, and Hsu Peng-fei had been giving her meaningful glances. Taking Cheng Yao affectionately by the arm, she introduced herself:

"My name is Mary. I'm a special correspondent of the Central News Agency. Look, there's a lively discussion going on over there by the brazier! Let's join them and warm ourselves."

"My name is Chen Ching. I work for the *Shukuang Daily*," she handed Mary her card. "I live in the *Shukuang Daily* quarters — Hsinmin Street. My room is No. 8 on the second floor. Come and see me when you have time."

"Oh, my dear!" simpered Mary saying the words in English, "there are so few women among all these reporters. Our profession is so backward in China — at least a century behind Europe and the United States. Why, in the U.S. many journalists and reporters are women who know how to get the most out of male subjects."

Mary looked at the telephone number on Cheng Yao's card and tendered her own, which was printed in English. At this moment Hsu Peng-fei walked up, his face all smiles.

"*Let me introduce you*," said Mary gaily, throwing in a few words of English. "This is my friend Chen Ching who works for the *Shukuang Daily*."

Hsu Peng-fei sat down on a seat beside Cheng Yao. As they warmed themselves at the brazier, he began:

"How fluent your English is, Mary. You couldn't be better suited for your post as a council member of the World Federation of Free Press. Don't you agree, Miss Chen?"

"There are too few women reporters at these receptions," complained Mary. "Next time the Government should give us special consideration. Oh, Miss Chen! Let's ask Mr. Hsu to take a picture of us!"

The *Central Daily* reporter overheard this and promptly came over. He took Mary's flash camera with the gallant remark:

"Ladies first! Always glad to serve the fair sex."

Cheng Yao hesitated. "Let's have some of the others in the picture too," she suggested.

The *Central Daily* reporter did not seem to hear. He focussed the camera on Cheng Yao, while Mary's arm coiled like a snake around her waist and held her fast. Hsu Peng-fei stood to one side, smiling and lighting a cigarette. Cheng Yao sensed the danger of her position, but she kept quiet and composed. The moment the reporter's finger was releasing the shutter she twisted around and cried: "All of you come and get your picture taken! You too, Mr. Glasses!" She heard the shutter click and was satisfied that only a blurred view of her back would show on the negative.

Several reporters came over, but she went on calling:

"Come on, let's all have our picture taken together!"

A military-looking man hurried into the room and made straight for Hsu Peng-fei. Bending over, he whispered in his ear. Cheng Yao indistinctly heard a few words: "General Chang . . . wants you . . . at once. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei's face darkened. He stood up and instantly left the room.

Songs, slogans and — what particularly exasperated Hsu Peng-fei — rhymed jingles increased in volume and intensity. The noise penetrated the tightly-closed windows of the luxurious office.

The curtains were all drawn. In the murky room, Hsu Peng-fei walked restlessly up to the big map of southwest China hanging on the wall. To kill time he examined the little red and blue flags on it. The red ones stood for Communist underground armed forces and the guerillas. They were clustered all over the area covering Yunnan, Kweichow, Szechuan and Sikang — Yunnan in particular. Some of them almost touched the Yunnan-Burma highway, as well as the Yunnan-Indochina Railway where he had just been on an inspection tour.

The shouting outside the window grew louder. He heard:

Peach trees bloom in May,
The Government's made of hay.
We want to eat every day,
The Government tells us nay.
The teachers strike for pay,
The Government says belay.
Students, just you say,
Should this Government stay?

"No! No!" came the answer from thousands of throats. Then they chanted in unison:

We want freedom! We want democracy!
We want rice to cook in our pots!
President Chiang, Acting President Li,
All that bunch are chamber-pots!

Hsu Peng-fei had not yet decided how he was going to handle these students. He continued to gaze at the map. He saw that red flags stretched from Mount Huaying and Tapa all the way to the southern part of Shensi Province. Every day, Chang Chun personally stuck in or moved these flags around, clusters of pinpricks indicating the fluid military situation. Yunnan was in a turmoil. It was quite possible that the increasing activities of the guerillas in that province might seriously hinder the use of the international route which was becoming ever more vital. The guerillas in northern and eastern Szechuan and Kweichow Provinces were obviously clearing the way for the advance of the People's Liberation Army, while there was a rash of popular uprisings in southern and western Szechuan and in Sikang. General Chang Chun kept telling him to take strict measures against the guerillas as their activities were apt to make the local authorities vacillate. The latter might even conclude secret peace agreements with the Communists or rebel against the Central Government.

The telephone rang, breaking in on Hsu Peng-fei's thoughts. He picked up the receiver, listened for a moment and replied bad-humouredly:

"Deal with the matter yourselves. General Chang is receiving the students' representatives." He had barely put down the receiver, when the phone rang again.

"Yes, this is Hsu Peng-fei, er —, I'm in General Chang's office. Come through the back door, and be careful — students are at the front gate."

The shouting outside the window grew louder.

Look, look, look! Fie, fie, fie!
They make civil war with foreign backing!
Drag, drag, drag! Lie, lie, lie!
See the dirty tricks the government's playing,
We protest! We outcry!
Unite! All students of Chungking!

Hsu Peng-fei had been called away from the press conference because of the student demonstration.

According to previous information, the demonstration had been set for the following afternoon, and preparations had been made accordingly: All the city's troops, police, gendarmes and secret agents were to have enforced a curfew along the route, to prevent the marchers from getting through and merging with the workers' ranks. The educational authorities as well as elements of the MIB, the CIB, the Youth Army and the San Min Chu Yi Youth Corps had been detailed to carry on disruptive activities, and hooligans had been bribed to provoke the students and clash with them so that charges of assaulting the populace and disturbing the peace could be brought against the demonstrators. The students' decision to advance their plans by a day had upset Hsu Peng-fei's carefully-laid plans.

The demonstrators were calling for opposition to U.S. imperialism, the end of the civil war, adequate food and clothing, and the right to live. These slogans had been raised by the Students' Association when it had started to mobilize the students all over the city for these patriotic demonstrations.

Hsu Peng-fei had found out about their terms beforehand. First: Stop the civil war and accept the Agreement on Internal

Peace.* Second: Abolish all secret service organizations and withdraw all reactionary party and youth institutions from the schools. Third: Guarantee human rights as well as the freedoms of speech and assembly. Fourth: Provide stipends to cover all students' expenses and raise the teachers' salaries.

But before Hsu Peng-fei and Chang Chun could agree on how to deal with the students, they had stormed into the premises of the Southwest Bureau and occupied the open square in front of the auditorium. Chang Chun had been compelled to receive the student representatives in person. Hsu Peng-fei was neither in a position to appear before them nor to take any action. He had tried to make a number of phone calls, but none got through. Now, beleaguered by the demonstrators, he was cooped up like a prisoner in Chang Chun's office. Chang Chun was negotiating with the students in the very next room, but the brick walls prevented him from hearing what was being said.

The Chief of Operations hurried in. "Chief! We've been phoning everywhere. I only just found out you were here."

He put a big briefcase bulging with papers and intelligence reports on the sofa.

"Did you come through the back door?"

The Chief of Operations nodded.

"You were saying just now over the phone —"

"I have several things to tell you," the Chief of Operations lowered his voice. "The workers at the arms plants have stolen large quantities of weapons and ammunition. We can't find out any details. . . ."

"That's a grave political matter," said Hsu Peng-fei. His attention had been concentrated on the students' movement and was taken aback by this news. It came on top of lagging arms

* On April 1, 1949, the Kuomintang government sent a delegation to Peking to negotiate peace with the delegation of the Communist Party of China. An Agreement on Internal Peace, comprising eight sections with twenty-four articles, was drafted but it was rejected by the Kuomintang government on April 20.

production, troubles from the workers and frequent incidents on vessels transporting weapons. He was being driven to distraction.

The Chief of Operations handed a sheaf of intelligence reports to the worried Hsu Peng-fei.

"Workers all over the city are getting ready to strike. They've also issued. . . ."

The telephone rang, cutting him short.

"Who is that? The USIS? General Chang isn't. . . . This is Hsu Peng-fei. . . . What? An announcement to all citizens of Chungking? . . . You say the workers issued it? . . . You've already obtained a copy? . . . I — I'll investigate immediately."

"Chief, I've brought a copy of it," said the Chief of Operations handing him a sheet of paper.

Hsu Peng-fei was in no mood to go through it at that moment so he asked the Chief of Operations to tell him the gist of it. He was told that the workers had announced a general strike throughout the city and were demanding that the government accept the Agreement on Internal Peace. . . . They had also revealed that the Kuomintang government were pushing up arms production during the peace talks — proof that the negotiations were only a stratagem to gain time.

"Did they mention the new weapons?"

"They've disclosed that bazookas and recoilless cannon are being manufactured under the supervision of American experts! They say the purpose of arms production is to continue the civil war, equip newly-formed fighting units and turn Szechuan and the whole Southwest into an anti-Communist civil war base."

"What the blazes! Order all factory police departments to make thorough investigations at once." Hsu Peng-fei was on the verge of giving other commands, but realizing that they were inappropriate, bellowed: "Peace talks! Peace talks! Bloody peace talks! Have all the copies of the proclamation confiscated right away!"

Hsu Peng-fei was in a very bad state. He walked over to the window and was about to pull back the curtains when the students' loud shouts assailed his ears.

"No! You must accept all our terms!"

"Tell Chang Chun to come out! Let him answer us in public!"

"Who cares a damn about your refreshments?"

Hsu Peng-fei peered between the curtains and saw a surging, heaving mass of students.

The ground was littered with the biscuits and sandwiches that Chang Chun had ordered his men to take out to them.

"They've absolutely no respect for the law," fumed Hsu Peng-fei. As if in answer, they roared:

Catch a mouse in the house,
Drown it! Drown it! Drown it!
A no-good government on the loose,
Down it! Down it! Down it!
It won't take long to cook its goose,
How will they try to save it?
American daddy,
Help! Help! Help!

This was followed by another storm of shouts:

Secret agents, just keep still!
You have guns, but we have a will,
We don't fear your bullets and steel,
We are more than you can kill,
When one dies,
Ten thousand rise!

Hsu Peng-fei pulled the curtains closer. His face was ashen grey. "Go ahead! Shout!" he snarled. "Another two months at the most, and I'll show you a thing or two!" Chu Chieh poked his head through the door and then walked in.

"Chief, look at this!"

"What's the matter?"

"The *Chungking Evening News* has published the workers' proclamation in full!"

"I thought you said you notified all newspapers not to publish it!"

"Yes, I did!" The Chief of Operations snatched the newspaper from Chu Chieh, quickly scanned it and yelled in dismay: "Confound it! There are even more details here than in the workers' proclamation!"

"What?"

"The paper also carries a long interview," explained Chu Chieh.

Hsu Peng-fei's brows drew together and he barked: "Buy up every copy of the *Chungking Evening News* as soon as it's out. They mustn't get into circulation!"

Chu Chieh made a wry face. "Chief, it sold out long ago. . . . This is the only copy the Second Department managed to get hold of."

Hsu Peng-fei, purple with rage, glowered at his subordinates.

"We could stop all future supplies of paper to the *Chungking Evening News*," suggested the Chief of Operations, "and secretly arrest the manager and chief editor. That would make the press more docile."

"I'm afraid that it wouldn't do at the moment," remarked Chu Chieh.

Hsu Peng-fei said nothing. He was listening to the students who were shouting again. The Chief of Operations made another suggestion: "Maybe we should put more patrols on the streets and make sudden searches."

Hsu Peng-fei turned around thoughtfully. He knew that the Chief of Operations' idea was not a very clever one, but it had certain good points.

Chu Chieh contemplated the Chief of Operations, then turned to Hsu Peng-fei.

"Many high-ranking government officials have moved their offices to Chungking lately," he said. "Frequent searches on the streets are likely to lead to trouble."

"The Second Department could issue passes," volunteered the Chief of Operations.

"It's not very easy to ask senior officials to paste their photographs on passes, is it?" countered Chu Chieh.

Hsu Peng-fei tried to think this out, while his attention was still concentrated on the turbulent students outside. He finally reached a decision.

"Issue two types of passes, ordinary ones and special ones. The special ones should be blue and without photographs, and the ordinary ones should be white and have photographs on them." Hsu Peng-fei paced back and forth a few moments and then ordered:

"Notify the Secretarial Section to see to this matter at once. Issue as few of the special blue passes as possible. Number them, and screen the recipients thoroughly."

Chu Chieh had something else to tell him. "Chief, Mary called you up at the Second Department just before I left."

"What does she want?"

Chu Chieh sniggered. "She said you had an appointment with her. She wants you to phone her personally."

Hsu Peng-fei nodded, and Chu Chieh immediately dialled the number for him.

"Hello, Mary? This is Hsu Peng-fei. . . . You say she hasn't gone back to the newspaper office? What about her room?"

Mary told him that Chen Ching, the young woman reporter working for the *Shukuang Daily*, had not been to her room that day, nor the whole week for that matter. Mary had looked into her room, and found that Chen Ching's things were still there.

Hsu Peng-fei was curious about this young woman reporter, but he was even more interested to find out what kind of people her associates were. He was certain that through her he would find a lead to the elusive underground Party organization. He had not unearthed a single new clue since losing Fu Chih-kao. Greatly annoyed, he said to Mary:

"You let a young girl like that give you the slip? No, keep your eyes open for her. Find out if she has any friends. . . . Right, check up there too. . . . As long as she still works as a reporter she may go back to her room for her things."

The shouting outside rose to a crescendo that shook the

windows. Hsu Peng-fei slammed down the receiver, pulled aside the curtains, and stared down at the angry sea of faces. He dragged deeply on his cigarette. His eyes gleamed and a sneer appeared on his face. Spinning on his heel, he barked at Chu Chieh:

"This is going to be the last student demonstration! I'll let them have their fun for a few more days, then I'll finish them off!"

Chu Chieh didn't understand, or perhaps he was dazed by the shouting outside, for he only murmured: "Finish them off?"

"That's what I said," Hsu Peng-fei said testily. "If students have the right to demonstrate, I have the right to shoot them down."

He was about to say more, but decided not to let his subordinates know too soon how he was going to proceed. He picked up the red guest-list he had brought back from the press conference and handed it to Chu Chieh with the words:

"Organize a squad to help Mary make a thorough check on all press circles." He was confident that once they found Chen Ching, they could work out some new plans to smash the underground Party organization.

The sneer was still on Hsu Peng-fei's lips as Chu Chieh left the room. He had in mind yet another scheme to uncover the Party Underground during this period of "peace talks," a scheme which had occurred to him after studying the situation at Chatzetung.

"Tell Cheng Ke-chang to return to the Second Department at once," he said to the Chief of Operations. Glancing at his watch he continued: "Tell him he's to go with me to Plum Garden to see the Special Adviser at seven o'clock sharp this evening."

Hsu Peng-fei lowered his voice to a harsh whisper:

"Cheng Ke-chang will be given a special mission. From now on his movements are to be kept an absolute secret!"

Towards the end of the afternoon conference, convened by the Students' Association, a few delegates proposed that the strike be terminated; they expressed disagreement with the holding of a city-wide student demonstration. There was a heated debate, and the presidium finally proposed an adjournment until the evening. The last two items on the agenda — the endorsement of two documents — were left over for the evening session.

The delegates continued their arguments after the meeting broke up. Cheng Yao, who had come to report on this conference, was angry with the minority opposition, especially because they included the representatives from Chungking University.

She went to the secretariat of the Students' Association and borrowed the two documents which had not yet been passed. One was the draft conference resolution and the other a statement calling on all Chungking students to step up their struggle. She was confident that both these documents would be passed during the evening session, so she sat down to copy them. After they had been passed, she would send them immediately to the papers for publication next morning.

As working conditions were a bit better during the peace talks, Cheng Yao and many of her young friends had become very active. Since her recent admission to the Party, her boundless energy and enthusiasm had made her long to give her all to the Party. Her brother Cheng Kang was her shining example, and she worked untiringly day and night, always feeling that she was doing too little.

The press conference had taught her a lesson she would not quickly forget. She had been carried away by her emotions, and her ill-considered action had attracted the enemy's attention. She had been criticized by Comrade Chao. In order to shake off Mary, the secret agent who went around posing as a correspondent of the Central News Agency, she had not returned to the newspaper office. Nevertheless, Cheng Yao kept on working as a reporter. With the success of the demonstration, the student movement had reached a new high and

during the last few days Cheng Yao had virtually become a special correspondent on student activities. She still sent in her articles to the paper, but signed them with different names. As far as the enemy was concerned, the reporter Chen Ching had vanished.

Cheng Yao hastily copied out the documents, her heart throbbing at their militancy. The student who had drafted these documents must have been an enthusiastic comrade, maybe even a fellow Communist. Before she had finished copying them, the girl from the secretariat who was in charge of the documents came in quietly and whispered: "Someone outside wants to see you."

"Me?" Cheng Yao was surprised. Who, apart from Comrade Chao, knew that she was here? Comrade Chao would not carelessly show himself in public, and besides, their relationship was a secret. She hesitated a moment, then walked to the door. Peering through the crack, she saw a round-faced and stockily-built young man. It was Chen Sung-lin, whom she hadn't seen for almost a year! He was slightly taller than when she had seen him last and his face was tanned, but otherwise he hadn't changed a bit. He was talking to a member of the presidium of the Students' Association and Cheng Yao noticed that he handed him a letter. Doubtless he had come here on a special mission.

She was delighted to see him, and she quickly led him into a small room and locked the door behind her.

"How did you know I was here?" she asked.

"Lao Li told me to look for you here."

"Li Ching-yuan?" Happy and surprised, Cheng Yao looked at Chen Sung-lin. He seemed to have become more mature.

"Are you Li Ching-yuan's message-bearer now?"

Chen Sung-lin shook his head but said nothing. He could hardly take his eyes off this girl. How she had changed!

"Where have you been this past year?" asked Cheng Yao. "Did you go back to the factory?"

"How could I? That secret agent Cheng Ke-chang sneaked

into the Yangtze Ordnance Works. He was there for a year, disguised as a worker and only left recently." Chen Sung-lin's round eyes blinked and he added with a grin: "By the way, I saw Hua Wei not long ago. He told me to come and look you up!"

"No fooling?"

"Why should I fool you?"

Cheng Yao saw that this was still the forthright and warm-hearted Chen Sung-lin she used to know.

"How's his work getting on?"

"Very well. He personally executed the traitor Fu Chih-kao and the secret agent Wei Chi-po. . . ." It was only after his trip to northern Szechuan that Chen Sung-lin learned about the attachment between Hua Wei and Cheng Yao, and he did not quite know how to transmit Hua Wei's love message to her.

"He says that after liberation he'll come and take you back to northern Szechuan. As for the rest — well — let him tell you himself when he comes. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin did not notice a blush spread over Cheng Yao's face. He had caught sight of the documents she was copying, skimmed hastily through them, and demanded angrily: "Who drafted them?"

"Why?" asked Cheng Yao, puzzled. "What's wrong?" She snatched back the two documents.

Chen Sung-lin shook his head and said disapprovingly: "Stay away from classes indefinitely? All Chungking students to demonstrate in the streets? Why, they're turning the student movement into an armed struggle. That's sheer recklessness. This is not the time for such things. The students must not be massacred."

It astonished Cheng Yao that he should hold the same opinion as the opposition in the Students' Association. She was not to be convinced so readily, and had plenty of arguments to back up her own position. "I disagree. After the success of the demonstration there should be a higher form of struggle and the middle-of-the-road students should be won over. As soon as the students demonstrate in the streets,

they'll be supported by the workers and the people. That will shake the rule of the reactionaries and hasten the collapse of the Kuomintang. Peace talks are going on now. The enemy are at the end of their tether and won't dare to suppress the demonstrations!"

"Drive a rat into a corner and he'll fight," said Chen Sung-lin, unmoved by Cheng Yao's arguments. "What's your reason for assuming that the enemy won't dare to suppress the students? We can't just charge blindly ahead. Remember Chairman Mao's three principles which teach us to fight the enemy 'on just grounds,' 'to our advantage' and 'with restraint.' If we rely simply on enthusiasm, the enemy'll be able to finish the lot of us off." After a moment he added: "No wonder Lao Li was so angry. He said you weren't to be a reporter any longer and make yourself conspicuous all over the place."

Cheng Yao paled. Suddenly subdued, she asked: "Am I to be transferred?"

"Did you hear of the Party Municipal Committee's estimation of the present situation?" continued Chen Sung-lin.

Cheng Yao shook her head. She had not seen Comrade Chao during the last few days.

"The Municipal Committee said that in the last period it was absolutely necessary to organize mass activities to expose the enemy's motives in proposing peace negotiations. It was also correct to raise the political consciousness of the middle-of-the-roaders through struggle . . ." Chen Sung-lin told Cheng Yao all he could remember about the Municipal Committee's directives. Although he did not fully understand them, he accepted them implicitly. He also told her that the Municipal Committee had learned that the enemy was planning a series of repressive moves and would employ terroristic measures such as arrests and killings to deal with the student demonstrations. In order to protect the masses and the activists, the struggle must take a new form without delay. All open, over-zealous activities were to be stopped, organizing was to be stepped up, the revolutionary forces were to go under cover,

and the struggle was to enter a new stage in preparation for liberation.

"And last but not least," Chen Sung-lin once more reminded her, "for goodness sake don't be so impulsive. I once took the wrong path too, you know, and had to learn my lesson the hard way. I feel that the Municipal Committee's estimation is entirely correct. During the last few days the enemy agents have been making sudden searches everywhere. They're about to move."

Cheng Yao listened attentively, gradually arriving at a new understanding of the situation and of how to carry on the struggle. How rash and naive she had been! Yet how happy she was to have the right direction pointed out to her. She now understood why Chen Sung-lin was so different from before. His round face was still youthful, but his eyes and expression had something in common with Yu Hsin-chiang's — yes, they were even like those of her brother Cheng Kang. Yet he was only a little older than herself. Now she understood why the minority at the students' conference, including the representatives from Chungking University, had persisted in changing the tactics of the struggle, and she admitted to herself that they had more political sense than she did.

Someone tapped on the door, and Cheng Yao opened it. It was the girl student from the secretariat. She handed a folded message to Chen Sung-lin and whispered:

"The presidium is having a meeting now. They're going to re-draft the documents."

She was obviously worried as she told Cheng Yao: "We've just been informed that secret agents are watching the conference hall, so the presidium has decided to hold this evening's meeting elsewhere. It will take place at. . . ."

Chen Sung-lin broke in, "She's not attending it." After the girl student had left, he told the perplexed Cheng Yao: "Things are moving. Let's go quickly."

He took a packet of cigarettes from his pocket, drew one out and handed it to Cheng Yao, saying softly: "This is a message from Li Ching-yuan. Destroy it when you've read it."

Cheng Yao carefully tore the cigarette apart and extracted a slip of paper. On it was written:

> Come to the Anping Life Insurance Company, No. 318, Linsen Road, at 8 tonight.

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THE sun shone through the window bars, bringing warmth into the cells. The men in Cell 7, like all the other prisoners, were completely absorbed in study. There was not a sound from them.

Texts copied on lavatory paper were passed from hand to hand. Lumps of clay served as chalk; the floor was covered with writing, wiped clean, and then written on again. In this atmosphere of apparent calm time slipped by. Liu Sze-yang put down the New Year Message he had read through so many times. How much strength and confidence in victory it brought! In this year of 1949, the People's Liberation Army would free the whole country, a political consultative conference without reactionaries would be convened and the founding of the People's Republic of China proclaimed! Liu Sze-yang had read the Message over and over again. It was filled with incomparable revolutionary determination and gave everyone boundless encouragement. No, the Chinese people would have no pity for vipers, reflected Liu Sze-yang. He would always remember the warning in the Message: "Moreover, the serpents infesting most of China, big or small, black or white, baring their poisonous fangs or assuming the guise of beautiful girls, are not yet frozen by the cold, although they already sense the threat of winter."

This New Year Message had been smuggled into the camp by the Chungking Party Underground, and the women prisoners had made and distributed many copies. That fluent, beautiful handwriting was undoubtedly Sun Ming-hsia's. She was helping Sister Chiang organize the studies in the concentration camp and was busy writing, just as when she had helped him to

monitor broadcasts from the Liberated Areas. Liu Sze-yang's heart warmed at the thought that they were both here, sharing this life of struggle. Long-buried memories rose out of the past.

"It's nearly time to eat," said someone. "Let's have a rest."

Ting Chang-fa chalked the last stroke of several big, wobbly characters on the floor: "Carry the revolution through to the end!" Then he rubbed them out with his hand. He put a pinch of tobacco in his home-made pipe. After a puff or two, he brought out a chess board and set out the clay pieces.

"Come on, Sze-yang, let's have a game."

A rapid tattoo on the bamboo clappers interrupted him. Yu Hsin-chiang, who was going out to get their food, turned around and told his cell mates:

"A car has come. Two secret agents are walking into the office."

This was strange. Very few cars ever came to the camp in broad daylight, and hardly any prisoners had been brought into or taken away from the camp lately.

As Yu Hsin-chiang was coming back with the food bucket a warder appeared at the cell door.

"Liu Sze-yang, get your things together, and come at once!"

A buzz of comment rose from the surprised prisoners. Yu Hsin-chiang was at the door with a few strides. "What's the hurry?" he snapped. "Let him have his breakfast first!"

The warder grinned: "He'll get much better food when he goes out."

The prisoners fell silent. Liu Sze-yang stood dazed for a moment, then blurted out: "I want to have my breakfast here!"

The warder shrugged and walked off.

Liu Sze-yang's heart was pounding. Go out? It had never occurred to him that he might be set free. Could it be true? He went to the door and looked towards the women's cells. Nobody was moving. The enemy had not come for Sun Ming-hsia, though her case was far less serious than his. Somehow he doubted that he was really being released. Were they going to question him again? Or was this something else?

Anyhow, he was leaving Chatzetung every soon. Liu Sze-yang felt a deep reluctance to part from his comrades with whom he had spent so many days and nights, to leave this firm collective, to leave these surroundings which had become so familiar during the past year. He might again be isolated and without support, as he had been just after his arrest. The very thought made him feel like a soldier cut off from his unit. The camp was a dark, fearful hell-hole, but it was also the crucible which had tempered his will into true steel.

"You'll probably be released," someone remarked.

"But I don't want to go out alone!"

Liu Sze-yang's eyes reddened, and tears dropped on his clothes.

"Pull yourself together, Liu Sze-yang," said Yu Hsin-chiang. He too was upset. Elder Brother, lying in his corner, propped himself up and beckoned: "Comrade Sze-yang. . . ."

Seeing that Elder Brother wanted to talk to Liu Sze-yang, Ting Chang-fa went to the door to keep watch.

Liu Sze-yang went over to the old man. In a voice that was thick and choked, he said: "Elder Brother!"

Elder Brother grasped his shoulders and asked slowly:

"Do you think you'll be set free?"

"They're probably taking me for questioning."

"It doesn't look like it," said Elder Brother. "There may be more to this. The Kuomintang is staging a peace offensive. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang grasped Elder Brother's emaciated hand and spoke from the depths of his heart: "No matter what happens, I'll live up to the education the Party has given me."

"Remember the words in the New Year Message. We must be able to recognize snakes even if they are disguised as beautiful women." Elder Brother paused a moment, then went on: "However, I don't think you'll be coming back here."

"Why?" Liu Sze-yang clutched his hand tighter.

"That's the enemy's way. It's quite possible that you'll simply be locked up somewhere else. Be prepared for that." Seeing Liu Sze-yang's distress, he added soothingly: "Don't worry. There will be comrades at the new place too. Besides, you have already gone through enough ordeals to be able to overcome the weaknesses of an intellectual."

"I can't bear to part with you comrades and leave this fighting collective!" Liu Sze-yang's tears flowed again as he said: "I shall always remember what the Party and you have taught me."

"If you are transferred to Pai House," continued Elder Brother in still lower tones, "get in touch with Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan, but don't be in too much of a hurry about it. Be even more careful at Pai House." Slowly and clearly, Elder Brother recited:

> All the closer for meeting in prison
> We part ere our bold plans succeed.
> Yet with silent pride we know:
> Our Army has reached Shenyang.

Elder Brother repeated these lines till Liu Sze-yang had committed them to memory.

"This was written by Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan just before I was transferred here from Pai House," he explained. "By that time nearly all the comrades who had come with us from the prisons in Chengtu had been killed. Only two of us were left, myself and another man, whose surname is Hua. He faced the firing squad with some other prisoners. They were shot, but for him it was a mock execution, and he remained alive. The experience probably drove him mad. We planned to break out of prison, but the conditions were too unfavourable. That is the meaning of the words 'bold plans.' Comrade Chi will trust you if you recite these lines to him. If you should be sent to Pai House, tell him that our 'bold plans' are under way, that the Party Underground is already in touch with us and that we shall establish contact with them in Pai House without fail."

Liu Sze-yang listened carefully to every word. He must remember them, for with them he could find new comrades-in-arms and make himself known to them.

Elder Brother's thin hand pressed his own. "That's all I have to tell you. You must get ready to leave now, Sze-yang."

"Elder Brother . . . take care of yourself!"

The other comrades did not want to disturb them, so they held their bowls and waited. When Liu Sze-yang turned back to them, Yu Hsin-chiang handed him a bowlful of coarse brown rice with some beans on top. Liu Sze-yang could not eat as a leaden weight seemed to press on his heart.

"Eat. You must eat something," his comrades urged him.

"Then help me with it, Yu Hsin-chiang." Liu Sze-yang emptied more than half the rice and all the beans into Yu Hsin-chiang's bowl.

"Eat it, you must look after your health."

Liu Sze-yang could not resist his comrades' warm-hearted concern, but it only added to the pain of separation. This was not just the usual sorrow of parting, but an emotion born of deep mutual understanding, of shared bitterness and hardships, a comradeship sealed in blood. Liu Sze-yang pushed around the grains of rice with his chopsticks. There was a lump in it. He fished it out and found half a salted egg which his comrades had slipped into his bowl. Tears sprang into his eyes again. This egg had been secretly sent in by the Party Underground, and the comrades had hoarded the precious gift for a long time. Even a feather can convey friendship, and this egg told Liu Sze-yang of the warmth of their hearts.

"Eat it. This is a token from the comrades."

Liu Sze-yang put down his bowl, got up slowly, took off his warm jacket and draped it around Elder Brother's thin shoulders. Then picking up his small bedding-roll, which the comrades had tied up for him, he made straight for the door. If he stayed any longer, he would burst into tears. Yu Hsin-chiang touched his arm and thrust a fountain-pen into his hand.

"Take this! It was given to me by Lao Hsu."

Liu Sze-yang accepted it wordlessly, then gave Yu Hsin-chiang a sheaf of papers. These were his *Verses from the Barred Window,* written during the last few months.

Secret agents appeared at the door of the cell. The time had come to part. The comrades silently took leave of each other with handclasps of mutual encouragement. The sound of singing rose from every cell and swelled into a majestic chorus. This was a declaration of their faith and their unyielding loyalty, and a loving farewell.

> . . . so that the next generation will suffer no more,
> We are willing to sit here
> Until the walls of this prison collapse. . . .

Humming this familiar tune with them, Liu Sze-yang walked slowly past each cell door, then paused before the women's cells. Sister Chiang looked at him with understanding and unbounded trust in her friendly eyes. Sun Ming-hsia was standing behind her, a red ribbon in her hair. Her eyes were wet, but she managed to hold back her tears. As she smiled her pale lips trembled; she seemed about to say something, but no words came out.

Liu Sze-yang walked on without a word. As he came near the high wall, the iron gate opened. The threshold lay before him. He turned back and raised both arms in farewell. He saw his comrades waving to him at their cell doors.

Liu Sze-yang had been taken to the Second Department and was sitting in an armchair in a drawing room, alone for the time being. An orderly had poured a cup of scented tea and then withdrawn. He sipped it slowly — it was almost a year since he had tasted tea. What would happen? Were new trials awaiting him? He did not know, but he was less disturbed than he had been last year when he was brought to this mysterious place for the first time. His heart-beat was just about normal and the emotions which had shaken him a few hours ago when he was leaving the collective and his comrades had now subsided into a strong sustaining force. He casually examined the luxurious room. It seemed strange to be in such surroundings again, but he did not give the matter any thought.

There was no need. Whatever was to happen would take place soon enough.

The jasmine in his teacup smelt delightful. Liu Sze-yang took another sip, and then absently contemplated the intricate designs on the cup.

"So you're here already, Third Brother?"

Liu Sze-yang slowly set down the cup and turned around. Second Brother had come into the room. Liu Sze-yang almost failed to recognize him at first glance as he had put on weight and was slightly bald. With his brother was Chief Interrogator Chu Chieh, who looked as dry as a stick.

"You're much thinner, Third Brother. Life in prison must have been hard."

"It wasn't so bad."

"We've been so worried about you," his brother remarked with the usual concern of a relative. "Now that the Kuomintang and the Communists are holding peace talks, Acting President Li has issued orders to release political prisoners. Eldest Brother asked me to come back from Shanghai especially to act as guarantor for your release."

Chu Chieh smiled and nodded.

"Guarantor for my release?" Liu Sze-yang repeated in surprise.

"Yes. I have already talked things over with Chief Hsu. He agreed fully and raised no obstacles."

"Release political prisoners? It's not that simple!" said Liu Sze-yang with a thin-lipped smile. "I don't believe in these Kuomintang tricks! We'll only be free again when the whole country is liberated."

"Mr. Liu, the political situation has changed rapidly these past weeks. Maybe you are not quite aware of how things stand," said Chu Chieh adopting a mild and kindly manner. He asked Liu Sze-yang and his brother to be seated, then went into a ponderous explanation:

"There have been momentous changes in the situation since the Generalissimo's proclamation on New Year's day calling

for peace talks. Acting President Li has repeatedly issued orders for the release of political prisoners throughout the country. The Government intends to show its sincere desire for peace by gradually setting free those at present detained. Chief Hsu has given precedence to your case because of the social standing of your eldest brother. Communists always take a realistic approach and know how to analyse a situation, so I'm sure you will not allow your judgment to be influenced by the Government's past actions or harbour suspicions about the release of political prisoners. As a demonstration of our good faith, Mr. Liu, you will be among the first group of Communists to be released by the Government. Starting today . . ." Chu Chieh stepped forward, and flashing a gold-toothed smile stretched his hand out to Liu Sze-yang. "I congratulate you on regaining your freedom."

Liu Sze-yang leapt to his feet and brushed aside Chu Chieh's hand. "How many prisoners are you releasing?"

"Well, in the first batch . . ." Chu Chieh rubbed his hands. "Er — the Government is still considering the matter. As you are a special case, Mr. Liu, you're naturally being given first consideration."

"So I'm the only one being released, am I?" Liu Sze-yang asked. "You order the release of political prisoners all over the country, and I'm the only one to be set free! Why don't you set free the Communists and patriotic democrats at Chatzetung, at Pai House and all the other SACO concentration camps? And what about all the revolutionaries in the countless concentration camps throughout the Kuomintang areas? Why don't you let them go? Chang Hsueh-liang and Yang Hu-cheng have been in prison for more than ten years now. How about releasing them? If you sincerely want peace talks, why don't you free all political prisoners right away? What is there for the Government to 'consider'?"

"Third Brother, what are you. . . ."

" 'Peace talks!' 'Sincere wish for peace!' You swindlers! After all the crimes I have witnessed this last year! No amount of

smooth talking can cover up facts written in blood. You've never stopped persecuting the imprisoned revolutionaries. You wouldn't let them have even a drop of water. How many of our comrades have been killed or maimed by American and Chinese tortures? You've slaughtered our Party's cadres and murdered the Liberation Army man Lung Kuang-hua. The people will make you answer for these crimes. Now you're trying to deceive the masses by putting on a show of peace talks and releasing just one prisoner. You're fooling yourselves, I tell you. The people can see through all your tricks."

"Third Brother, please don't talk so much."

"The Kuomintang can spread rumours and slanders, and do all the foul things they wish. Why shouldn't a Communist have his say?"

"Mr. Liu, restrain yourself," said Chu Chieh through pursed lips. "You are still at the Second Department and I think you should value your personal freedom."

"What's that?" Liu Sze-yang advanced a step. "Do you think such cheap freedom can shut my mouth? I don't give a damn for such freedom!" Liu Sze-yang stood in the centre of the room as if he owned the place and said curtly: "Send me back to Chatzetung immediately!"

Second Brother got hurriedly to his feet and pleaded: "Third Brother! You've no idea how many people we went to see just to get your red label removed, and how much...." But he thought it better not to mention the word 'money' in front of Chu Chieh, and said instead: "Mr. Hsu tells me your behaviour was unsatisfactory. If it weren't for the peace talks, he wouldn't have agreed to your release."

"And what was wrong with my behaviour? We Communists know how to behave. It's just that we don't speak the same language as them. You'd better go back, Second Brother."

"Mr. Liu!" Chu Chieh hastily interposed. "Although you have many personal grievances against the Government, the Government will keep its word. It is generous and insists on releasing you even though you attack it. The Government will

leave no stone unturned to show its good faith. You are not the only one to be freed. We are checking the lists and are preparing gradually to release all the political prisoners...."

"I'm not leaving here before you free them all!" replied Liu Sze-yang.

Chu Chieh smiled ingratiatingly. "I guarantee that they will be released. But you, Mr. Liu, must leave first, otherwise I'll have difficulty in explaining it to the Chief. Everyone knows how slowly the Government acts. Our American allies have more than once criticized us for lack of efficiency. Releasing the political prisoners is very important, and this time I will certainly do my best to push the matter through without delay."

"In that case, Chief Interrogator, we'll be leaving. Are there any more formalities?" said Second Brother, smiling and nodding. "I'll come another day to thank Chief Hsu in person...." He took Liu Sze-yang firmly by the arm and made for the door.

"Let me go," said Liu Sze-yang shaking off his brother's hand. He went back to the armchair, sat down, and looked hard at Chu Chieh, who averted his eyes.

"I'm not going," he announced calmly.

Nonplussed, Chu Chieh stared at him. He did not know what to say. Second Brother was equally at a loss for words, and could only mumble: "Third Brother, what's come over you?"

"I'm staying until all my comrades imprisoned at SACO are released."

"Look, Third Brother, didn't Mr. Chu just tell you that the Government is slowly getting things done? After the peace talks the Kuomintang and the Communists will co-operate, and sooner or later the political prisoners will be let out. Why be so stubborn? Besides, the earlier you're set free, the less worries for the family."

"No," said Liu Sze-yang, shaking his head. "I'm not going out alone." He got to his feet and walked up to Chu Chieh: "Send me back to the concentration camp at once!"

Chu Chieh laughed coldly, then his face darkened. "Mr. Liu, it's not up to you to decide whether you go or not. This is a government decision."

He went to the door and beckoned. Several armed agents rushed in, took Liu Sze-yang by the arms, and propelled him out of the room. Despite his angry protests, they dragged Liu Sze-yang down the stairs and pushed him into his brother's car.

"Thank you for taking so much trouble, Chief Interrogator!" Second Brother called back with a wave of his hand, and added anxiously: "Have you any more instructions?"

"This is pure kidnapping!" shouted Liu Sze-yang, his face red with anger.

The car sped through the prosperous downtown streets, but he did not give them a glance. He was seething with rage at the enemy's shameless trickery. Never would he recognize this forced release.

The wind blowing into the car ruffled his hair and calmed him down. He pulled himself together and began to take stock of the situation. Tomorrow morning the papers would be bound to publish articles saying that political prisoners had been released. They would say that the Communist Liu Sze-yang had been set free, and use his name to hoodwink the people. He must expose them somehow and let people know the truth — that none of the prisoners held in SACO concentration camps had been given their freedom, and that the "release" of political prisoners was nothing but a fraud.

How should he set about it? Contact the Party and find Comrade Li Ching-yuan, report the facts and work out counter-measures? Or would it be more advisable to wait a while before seeking his comrades? Perhaps he should first look up his journalist friends and make a statement revealing the truth and exposing the enemy? Suddenly a new suspicion assailed him. What if the enemy were releasing him only to set the secret agents to spy on him? In that case, he would be bringing danger wherever he went. The enemy would

certainly take full advantage of his urgent desire to find the Party and use him to lay an even bigger trap! Liu Sze-yang could almost feel the eyes of invisible agents watching his every move.

They were now driving past the Huahua Department Store. "Stop the car!" demanded Liu Sze-yang. "I want to get out."

"What for?" Second Brother asked in surprise. "If there's anything you want to do, come home first."

"I want to do a bit of shopping," insisted Liu Sze-yang. He had made a plan, though he was not going to tell Second Brother about it. He would stroll around the department store for a while and lose himself among the crowds. Then the enemy could no more find him than a fish in the ocean. That would bring all their plots to naught. He smiled: "Just look at me. I need soap, and a toothbrush."

As the automobile slowed down, a jeep drove up behind them. Liu Sze-yang at once realized that they were being followed. His brother also looked back.

"Don't get out, Third Brother. A jeep from the Second Department is following us."

Liu Sze-yang smiled coldly: "So this is Chu Chieh's so-called sincerity for peace! The shameless so-and-so!"

"Let's go home," his brother said. "We can talk there."

Liu Sze-yang was silent, trying to find some way of dealing with these new developments.

Their car drove into a quiet neighbourhood and came to a halt at the tree-shaded gate of the mansion owned by the Liu family.

"Home again, Third Brother."

As they got out of the car, Liu Sze-yang noticed the jeep turning down another street.

Several suspicious-looking characters were loitering near the gate. The words "house arrest" flashed through Liu Sze-yang's mind. He stood there for a while, calmly inspecting these men, and only when his brother urged him did he enter.

Liu Sze-yang went to his bedroom. It was on the first

floor and overlooked the Chialing River. The house was surrounded by a large garden with a rockery, and a goldfish pool was visible among the trees and bushes. The handsome mansion and its luxurious furnishings now seemed strange and alien to Liu Sze-yang. This was home, but it did not feel like it to him. His thoughts were far away in Cell 7 at Chatzetung, where life was a struggle.

Second Brother poured him a cup of tea, then pointed at the furniture in the room. "Everything here is the same as on the day you were arrested. Have a bath and change your clothes — they're in the cupboard. Your desk, radio, and electric stove. . . . Ah, the milk has come, let me heat it for you."

Second Brother picked up a pint bottle. He tore off the paper cover, poured the milk into an aluminum pan, and put it on the electric stove to boil.

"Life must have been very hard at the concentration camp. You're much thinner, so you must feed yourself up, now that you're at home. I'll get a doctor to give you a thorough check-up and prescribe you some tonic in a day or two. . . . Look at your whiskers! And you need a haircut."

"My health is excellent, and since I'm not free I can do without a haircut," interrupted Liu Sze-yang. "What did Hsu Peng-fei say to you?"

Second Brother stood there uncertainly. After a long pause he said: "Let's not talk about that. Since your arrest, I've called on him, invited him to dinner, and sent him gifts. He's a vicious, greedy devil. We had to give all the gold bars he asked for, he wouldn't take a cent less!"

Liu Sze-yang didn't care to listen to this kind of talk. He walked to the window and pushed it open. The sky was overcast, and the day dull. He turned around again.

"Did you agree to have me kept under house arrest?"

"Chief Hsu said that the Second Department would station men outside the gate for your safety, and that for the time being you were not to go out. He'll hold me responsible if

anything happens while you're at home. This wasn't what I wanted, Third Brother."

Liu Sze-yang did not answer.

"Chief Hsu said that he was releasing you on condition that you refrained from political activities."

Liu Sze-yang still made no answer. He knew that anger would not help him. He had to be calm if he was to act effectively.

"What else did Hsu Peng-fei say?"

"Nothing else. I intend to have another talk with him soon. We'll give him some more money and get his permission for you to go to Hongkong. It's not safe for you to stay in Chungking."

"I'm not going to Hongkong."

"I was thinking that after you got to Hongkong, you could perhaps go to the liberated areas. . . ."

"Judging from the present situation, I can't even go on the streets, much less to Hongkong. Second Brother, find some way of sending a letter to a newspaper office for me!"

"That won't do. Chief Hsu has said expressly that you're not to publish any statements in the papers. And even if I sent one, none of the papers would dare print it."

Liu Sze-yang was conscious of a relentless pressure, yet he was determined not to let the enemy push him around. He walked slowly to his desk. The writing-brushes were still in their usual rack. He pulled open the drawer, and found the news bulletin that he had been copying at the time of his arrest still hidden in the crack. He could continue to listen to the broadcasts. At least this would be some form of contact with the outside world. He switched on the radio, and with practised fingers he spun the knob to the wave-length he wanted. He waited a moment, but the radio was completely dead.

Second Brother switched off the radio. "The authorities prohibit listening to Communist broadcasts. In Nanking, Shanghai and elsewhere, they've ordered short-wave equipment to be removed from all radios."

After a sleepless night, Liu Sze-yang got up very early and went out into the garden.

He wandered along the paths, his eyes turning frequently to the little corner-gate not far from the river. The lock was rusted after many years of disuse. If he only could slip out of that door. It would only take two or three minutes to reach the river. He could swim the three or four hundred metres to the other side. Then, having escaped the enemy's clutches, he would return to the fighting ranks.

Liu Sze-yang gazed at the corner-gate. It gave him a thread of hope, but he realized that he had to wait a while as plain-clothes men must be watching the house. The enemy would relax their vigilance after a few days, and then he could slip out some dark night with some chance of success.

Liu Sze-yang did not want to stay in the garden too long. Enemy agents were watching him and he had to be cautious. He walked through a clump of trees to the pond, where the rays of the sun filtered through the clouds and shone on the goldfish swimming near the surface of the water, their round mouths half above the water. He glanced at his watch. It was after seven, and the papers should be coming. He went back along a shady path to the house, then stood on the terrace, leaning against a stone pillar.

The little door beside the main gate opened with a slight creak. It was not the news-boy, but a milkman. He took several bottles from his cart, mounted the steps and placed the bottles in the milk box. After glancing at Liu Sze-yang he was on his way again, pushing his cart before him.

Liu Sze-yang had watched the milkman come and go. City life, with all these people hustling and bustling for the comfort of others, seemed remote to him now.

Soon the news-boy came. Liu Sze-yang impatiently unfolded the papers. Just as he had expected, the local news-page of the *Central Daily* announced in bold headlines: "Government's Sincerity in Peace Talks. Political Prisoners Freed." And below in smaller type: "Communist Liu Sze-yang in First

By Li Shao-yen

Batch Released Yesterday." With mounting anger he read on. There was what purported to be an interview with him by the Central News Agency correspondent Mary. The substance of it was that she had visited Liu Sze-yang, who was happy and grateful to the Government for its lenient policy and expressed support for the authorities' sincerity in the peace negotiations. There was also a statement, allegedly by Liu Sze-yang, in which he said that he was now recovering at home and would be taking no part in politics for the time being.

"Shameless lies!" Liu Sze-yang flung the paper on the ground and stamped into the house. He had expected such articles to appear in the papers, but he had not thought that the enemy would go so far. Outraged, he went to find his brother, but he had already left the house so Liu Sze-yang had no way to vent his anger. He had to let the people know the real facts. He had to find a way to expose the enemy's deceptions and plots, and to tell the masses about the many revolutionaries imprisoned near Mount Kolo with no sign of being released. He had to escape from his home as soon as possible and break through the enemy's cordon. He thought of the little corner-gate in the garden and quickly made up his mind: tonight, this very night, he would try to escape. If he could only reach the river and swim across. He tried to visualize where the enemy's agents would patrol and where they might stop him. He felt that he had a fair chance of succeeding if he made a determined try.

In any case, it should be much easier to escape from house arrest than from the concentration camp. Moreover, a year of prison life had taught him a lot about how to deal with the Kuomintang agents. If they opened fire or staged a large-scale man-hunt, that would only publicly expose how "sincere" the enemy was over the release of prisoners.

The morning sped by. Second Brother had not yet returned, so there was no one in the house to disturb him. After lunch, Liu Sze-yang forced himself to take a long nap to renew his energies. When he woke up late in the afternoon, he was in excellent spirits and was composed enough to read through some

old newspapers. His attention was drawn to some reports on the Liberated Areas and the Chinese Communist Party in some independent newspapers. The headlines read:

"Communist Party Publishes Eight Sections with Twenty-four Articles as Basis for Peace Talks."

Liu Sze-yang repeated them aloud happily and then applied himself to the rest of the article. About half an hour later, he had the main points fixed firmly in his mind. He thought them over for a while, then poured himself a glass of water and resumed his reading.

"Ministry of Defence Announces Peaceful Liberation of Peiping."

Liu Sze-yang read on avidly:

"According to the Central News Agency, the North China authorities have announced that in order to shorten the war, secure peace and thereby preserve the cultural and historic monuments of the ancient capital, Peiping, Commander-in-Chief Fu Tso-yi has issued a statement on the 22nd, declaring the cessation of hostilities as from 10 a.m. of that day. . . ."

"Claptrap!" Liu Sze-yang couldn't help snorting. "They get beaten, then the Ministry of Defence has the effrontery to declare peace. That's a real masterpiece!"

He read on:

"Acting President Li Again Orders Release of Political Prisoners. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang smiled contemptuously, thinking: "Fair words and dirty deeds."

"Government Requests Workers' Co-operation for Speedy Return to Work, Chungking Students Demonstrate and Petition Authorities . . . Chang Chun Receives Student Representatives . . . Students' Four Conditions Accepted. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang saw from the date-line that this news was several months old. Suddenly he spotted a strange report.

"General Yang Hu-cheng in Secret Prison near Tsechikou!"

Where did that news come from? he asked himself. So they

had even found out about General Yang Hu-cheng! He quickly read through the item.

"As news of the proposed peace talks sweeps the country, people everywhere are demanding that the Government show its sincerity by releasing Generals Chang and Yang. It is said in various quarters that General Yang Hu-cheng is imprisoned in Chungking itself. Your reporter has repeatedly interviewed Mayor Yang Sen and other high-ranking government officials who profess ignorance of the matter, but state that if General Yang Hu-cheng is actually in Chungking he will be released as soon as his whereabouts are ascertained. . . .

"Recently your reporter has obtained reliable information that General Yang Hu-cheng has been detained in Chungking ever since the end of the Anti-Japanese War, and is now being held in a secret prison near Mount Kolo, in the vicinity of Tsechikou. If the Government gives permission, your reporter is willing to make an on-the-spot investigation. . . ."

Where had this "reliable" information come from? The reporter's name — Chen Ching — was unfamiliar. Maybe it was a pen-name. He remembered that some time ago the prisoners at Chatzetung secretly prepared and sent out a list of political detainees in the various concentration camps, but he had not heard that Yang Hu-cheng was in Chungking, nor had anyone else at the camp as far as he knew. Who could have sent out such precise information?

Liu Sze-yang thought deeply about this report. It reminded him of the Party's strength and the extent of its activities. It gave him confidence that the Party would smash all obstacles, and expose the enemy's crimes and plots to the world. As for himself, he would most certainly find some means within the next few days of publicly refuting the slanders of the reactionaries and exposing their villainy.

The leaves of the trees rustled outside the window. A wind had arisen after dusk. Dark clouds overcast the sky and a few scattered raindrops pattered against the panes.

The gusts of wind blew stronger. They were a comfort and

encouragement to Liu Sze-yang. He pressed his burning face against the window, welcoming the stormy night. It seemed as if nature was responding to his wishes. The wind and rain became heavier and the sky darker; they would provide excellent cover for his escape.

The night deepened, and still Liu Sze-yang waited. His chance to slip through the enemy's net would come two or three hours before the dawn, when the wind and rain, the cold and the darkness would have made them careless.

He lay down on his bed and turned off the light, waiting. In his half-sleep he heard the faint ticking of his watch, the howl of the wind and heavy raindrops pattering on the leaves.

The night was pitch-dark. Liu Sze-yang looked at his watch. The pale-green luminous hands indicated that it was past three o'clock. Time for action. He put on soft-soled rubber shoes and threw a dark jacket over his shoulders. He looked out of the window, calculating his moves. Once more he searched his mind for anything he might have forgotten or overlooked. No — all was ready. He decided to leave at once.

Just then there was a light tapping at the door. It stopped, and was repeated. Had his brother returned in the middle of the night to tell him something? Liu Sze-yang switched on the light, took off his jacket and transferred the key of the little corner-gate from the jacket to his shirt-pocket. Then he opened the door.

A stranger in a raincoat stood before him, rain dripping from the peak of his cap.

"Are you Liu Sze-yang?"

"I am."

Before he could make out his visitor's features, the stranger sauntered into the room and shut the door behind him.

"The Party has sent me," he said in low tones. He took off his dripping raincoat and hung it on the hook. His forbidding gaze swept the well-furnished room. Unhurriedly he ripped open the cuff of his sleeve and extracted a thin roll of

paper which he handed to the suspicious Liu Sze-yang. Hesitantly, the latter unrolled it — it was blank.

"Put it in water," said the visitor, lighting a cigarette.

Liu Sze-yang doubted whether the Party would have risked sending anyone, but, he put the paper in a basin of water. Within a few seconds, blurred writing appeared:

Comrade Liu Sze-yang, I'm sending Comrade Chu to contact you.
Li Ching-yuan

Liu Sze-yang fished out the sopping paper and tore it to shreds.

"Are you Comrade Chu?"

The visitor smiled and nodded: "Li Ching-yuan sent me."

Liu Sze-yang was not convinced. He said slowly: "This is most unexpected. The secret agents are on guard outside. . . ."

"Li Ching-yuan knows your house well. He told me to jump over the wall facing the river. It was raining hard and the agents had taken shelter. I was lucky." Chu paused, then his voice became severe: "Comrade Li is very angry with you for making a statement to the papers. Have you forgotten that you were once a Communist?"

"As a Party member I have done nothing against principle, nor anything to harm the Party's interests."

"You cannot call yourself a Party member any longer," Chu said coldly.

Liu Sze-yang jumped to his feet, the blood rushing to his face. He lost control of himself and refused to believe what he had just been told. He would not accept it! He must justify himself.

"Why?" he asked.

"Party regulations stipulate that the moment a comrade is arrested, he loses his Party membership. You must know this. Anyhow, you expressed 'gratitude' to the reactionaries and 'support' for their actions, and promised to keep out of politics. Do you think this is consistent with being a Communist?"

"I said no such thing," Liu Sze-yang said heatedly. "These are enemy lies and fabrications!"

"Facts are stronger than arguments," Chu declared, then went on in calmer tones: "Comrade Li has analyzed your family origin, your history and past conduct. He has many doubts about your release. It's true that your statement was published in the notoriously untruthful *Central Daily*, but there's no smoke without fire. He has sent me to investigate. If you've done nothing unprincipled, the Party must find some way to refute publicly the Kuomintang slanders against you."

Without the slightest hesitation Liu Sze-yang said: "These slanders are directed not only against me, but, what is more important, the Party. They are intended to trick the masses into believing that the enemy is releasing political prisoners."

"It cannot be decided yet whether your Party membership will be restored or not," said Chu. "My mission as a representative of the Party is to examine your conduct in prison. The question of restoring your membership will be given serious consideration on the basis of your conduct and other evidence. Your name was on the Party members' list sent out from the SACO concentration camps, but we don't have much else to go on. . . ."

While resentful that the Party did not trust him, Liu Sze-yang had been closely observing his visitor. He was astounded when he mentioned the list, as he was positive that only the Party Underground knew of it. Liu Sze-yang was finally convinced that his nocturnal visitor was really a comrade.

"Your release from prison is particularly suspicious," said Chu, seeming not to notice Liu Sze-yang's changed expression. He continued:

"Of course the enemy may have let you out on the pretext of 'peace talks,' hoping to deceive the masses. But why didn't they release anyone else? Why should they free only you, a Communist, and not even any independent democrats? On behalf of the Party, I formally notify you that you must report to the Party on your conduct and activities in prison and submit

to the Party's investigation. You must not conceal anything, not even if you wrote a confession or a statement of repentance. You must give a clear, thorough account, so that the Party can make an objective appraisal of your behaviour."

Liu Sze-yang could have said many things in self-vindication, but he did his best to control himself and simply said: "I have never gone against principle. The Party may rigorously examine my every word and action."

"Of course," said Chu, "the matter can and must be thoroughly investigated. The Party is also able to obtain direct information about your behaviour in prison through its contacts there. Moreover, I am the Party's representative and my safety in your home will be another test for you."

"Comrade Chu!" Liu Sze-yang was startled and angered by this unexpected test. He himself was closely watched by the secret agents. How could he guarantee Chu's safety?

"Comrade Li thought that once in your house it would be too risky for me to go out, so I'll stay here for a few days. The next step will depend on how things turn out. If anything happens to me while I'm here, you'll be partly responsible, won't you?"

Liu Sze-yang maintained an embarrassed silence.

"It's past four, so that will be all for now." Chu leaned back in the armchair, sipping his tea. He said slowly: "You must first write a full statement about your release. If the newspaper articles were concoctions by the reactionaries, the Party will publish your material and strike the enemy an unexpected counter-blow."

Liu Sze-yang fully agreed to this. He had already thought of doing it himself. But he said doubtfully: "Maybe the papers won't dare to print it!"

"Chungking newspapers may not, but those in Hongkong will, and so will *Forward*."

"I'll start right away, Comrade Chu. You sleep on my bed. I'll arrange your accommodation properly tomorrow."

Liu Sze-yang did not like Chu's overbearing attitude and felt uncomfortable with him.

"You don't have to start now, there's plenty of time. Let's go on chatting." Chu seated himself on the bed, a cigarette dangling from the corner of his mouth. He pulled off his rain-soaked boots and then looked up at Liu Sze-yang who showed no sign of wanting to rest. "I understand why you're in such a hurry," he said somewhat more pleasantly, "you can start now if you like. But remember that the Party needs us for more work in the future, so you'd better take care of your health. You must have had a very tough time in the concentration camp."

"I could take it," replied Liu Sze-yang off-handedly. He switched on the desk-lamp and laid a sheet of paper before him.

He was astonished that the Party should have sent someone. Ordinarily, comrades under house arrest did not seek contact with the Party, nor did the Party approach them. But since it had sent someone and with such urgency. . . . Furthermore, Chu's words had implied that the Party distrusted him and was treating him with reserve. . . . Liu Sze-yang felt deeply wronged, but at the same time he told himself that no member should take such an unhealthy attitude towards a Party investigation. It was his duty to help the Party clear up the matter.

The next morning Liu Sze-yang re-wrote the personal statement he had drafted the night before. Contrary to Chu's demand, it contained no secret information. Its purpose was to clarify his stand and expose the Kuomintang's release of political prisoners as nothing but a fraud. It could be published by any paper without giving away any Party secrets. He handed it to Chu, who glanced at the neat handwriting and said: "You write quite a fair hand."

Liu Sze-yang smiled sadly. This was the handwriting he had used when copying down the news broadcasts for the *Forward*. He did not wish to boast of his past deeds and merely said:

"I've written about my experiences at the Second Department, what Chu Chieh said to me, and how I was released against my will and placed under house arrest. I never saw anyone called Mary, nor did I make any statement to the press."

"Very well, I'll read it and then we'll see." Chu placed the statement on the desk and patted Liu Sze-yang affectionately on the shoulder.

"Go to sleep now. Everything else can wait."

"I'm not tired."

"Come on now! You can't do without sleep."

Just then Second Brother came in. He halted, surprised at seeing a stranger in the room. After a long silence he said: "It's almost time for breakfast. I thought you weren't up yet. . . . Sze-yang, please come out a moment!"

Chu nodded. "Go ahead."

After an instant's hesitation, Liu Sze-yang followed his brother out of the room.

"Who's he?" his brother asked in a whisper, obviously frightened.

"A friend of mine," replied Liu Sze-yang.

"How did he get in?"

"Over the wall. He came last night."

"Oh no! Secret agents are just outside the gate. How could you? You'll be the death of me yet. If the secret agents find out by any chance, I'll be hauled in too."

"Since you know it's dangerous, do your best to protect him!"

"Protect him? How can I?"

"Just say eldest brother sent him on business from the import-export company in Shanghai. Have a guest-room fixed up for him."

Second Brother wavered. "That's dangerous."

"Didn't you say you wanted to do something for the people? This is your chance," said Liu Sze-yang.

Second Brother was silent a while, then muttered: "Ask him to come down for breakfast."

Apart from the exchange of a few civilities between Second Brother and Chu, the meal passed in silence. Afterwards,

Chu ordered Liu Sze-yang to take a rest. Liu Sze-yang reluctantly obeyed and slept a few hours. In the afternoon, Chu read Liu Sze-yang's statement and told him about some of the Party Underground's recent activities. Then he mentioned that Li Ching-yuan wanted him to write out a detailed report about the Party organization in the concentration camp, so that the Underground could strengthen contacts with it and find some way to rescue the imprisoned comrades.

Chu spoke vaguely, but with assurance. Liu Sze-yang was not so ready to agree to this last request. Although he did not know the whole situation at the camp he was fairly well informed. He knew, for instance, that the Underground maintained fairly regular contact with the prisoners and that it frequently sent in documents and medicine. Then there was Lao Hsu's opinion on how the prisoners' struggle should proceed, as well as certain facts about the Party organization there. All this was highly confidential, and could not be lightly divulged to any comrade. Of course, the Party Underground urgently needed this information; but a year of complicated struggle had taught him a lot, and he knew that such top secret information should only be passed on to highly-placed comrades, and then only by word of mouth. In his case he would have to report to Comrade Li Ching-yuan personally; not in writing, nor through a third party. Besides, Chu, like himself, was surrounded by the enemy. But would it increase the Party's suspicions if he refused to write out this secret information? Liu Sze-yang decided that he should not think so much about himself, and should act only according to Party principles. This was different from his personal statement. He should not reveal Party secrets just because he was afraid of being misunderstood.

"Let me think it over."

Chu seemed to understand. "All right," he said. "The Party needs the information to organize a rescue." Chu hesitated for a moment and then continued: "You remember the revolt that broke out at the Shangjao concentration camp. It would be

advisable for the comrades in Chatzetung to co-ordinate their activities with the armed forces of the Party Underground, then we'll be able to strike a concerted blow from both inside and outside. But we must strengthen the liaison between the Party Underground and the Party organization inside the concentration camp. When the Party has finished investigating you, it will probably assign you to take part in the maintenance of that liaison."

Chu lit another cigarette. Observing that Liu Sze-yang was unwilling to say anything else, he inhaled deeply and continued: "Write out your report tomorrow or tonight. It should cover the organizational structure of the Party at the concentration camp, how it operates, the behaviour of the comrades you know, possible methods to establish contact with it, and so forth. The advantage of a written report is that it's more precise than an oral one. Of course, it's more risky, but I'm confident that your report will safely reach the Party. Since I'm now acting as a representative of your eldest brother's export-import company, I can openly come and go in your second brother's car. Liu Sze-yang, I hope you will do your best to fulfil the important task the Party has given you. This will greatly facilitate the investigation of your behaviour while in prison."

Liu Sze-yang turned this over in his mind before he said slowly: "I have nothing more to write."

"Impossible," said Chu, shaking his head. In a quiet but firm voice he went on: "Think it over carefully. It is a principle of our Party that no member may keep anything back from the organization!"

Chu looked displeased. He tossed Liu Sze-yang's statement on the desk in a way that expressed distrust and a lack of interest, and then went into the drawing room.

Liu Sze-yang was too distressed to sleep that night. He felt that the way Chu had thrown back his statement was an obvious threat. It seemed to imply that if he did not write out the secret information the Party would not consider restoring his

membership. Liu Sze-yang felt that he was in a very difficult position, and he could not repress a growing suspicion. Chu's attitude did not seem to be that of a Communist.

At daybreak, Liu Sze-yang got up and walked around the garden unhappily. The fresh air cleared his mind somewhat. Another question flashed in his mind. Why was Chu in such a hurry? Why was he concentrating on getting information about the Party in the concentration camp, and not on investigating him, as he had declared when he first came? Why was he linking the restoration of his Party membership with whether or not he wrote the report? Bigger doubts loomed in his mind.

Liu Sze-yang was now alerted. He had to think this matter over calmly and get to the bottom of the extraordinary arrival of this man who called himself a representative of the Party Underground.

The small door beside the main gate opened and the milkman walked in. As usual, he strode up the shaded path and put several bottles in the milk box near the steps. Liu Sze-yang strolled across to get one. The milkman guessed Liu Sze-yang's intention, and picking out a bottle handed it to him with a significant glance.

"This one is yours," he said, then turned and walked away.

Liu Sze-yang's heart leapt. There was something behind those words! He took the bottle upstairs, tiptoeing past Chu's bedroom. He now clearly sensed his danger. Once in his bedroom, he carefully inspected the bottle. It was no different from any other. He emptied its contents into his aluminum pan, but there was nothing inside either. Liu Sze-yang stared at the bottle in disappointment. Then he noticed the paper cap which he had thrown into the waste paper basket. He picked it out, and feeling it carefully, found that it was slightly thicker than usual. He quickly tore it apart and found a slip of paper inside with Li Ching-yuan's familiar handwriting. He read:

> The enemy is watching you closely. You are in danger. Get out at once. After you escape, go into hiding. Don't try to contact the Party.

Don't try to contact the Party? Liu Sze-yang read the note again. Elder Brother's words sounded clearly in his ears: "We must be able to discern snakes even if they are disguised as beautiful women." The slip of paper Chu had given him the night before last had also been signed with Li Ching-yuan's name, but as the note had been written in invisible ink which had run and because he had read it in a dim light, it had been impossible to recognize the handwriting. This note, however, was authentic. The man who called himself Chu was a poisonous snake sent by the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries!

Liu Sze-yang locked his door. He picked up the statement which the enemy agent had tossed on to his desk, and lit it on the electric stove. He threw the ashes into the wash-basin and ran them down the plug-hole. There had been nothing secret in this statement, but burning it served as an outlet for his rage.

He wanted to leave immediately, but it was now broad daylight, and he could not possibly get away. Hiding the key to the corner-gate, he began to plan his next moves.

Footsteps approached and someone knocked at the door.

"Who is it?"

"Me, Lao Chu."

Liu Sze-yang decided not to arouse Chu's suspicions. Instead he would feed him a fictitious report. At nightfall, while the agent was still congratulating himself on his success, he would find an opportunity to make a sudden break.

Liu Sze-yang calmly went to the door and opened it.

19

LIU Sze-yang did not escape from the enemy's clutches. He was arrested again.

The heavily-guarded gate of SACO headquarters flashed by, and before his eyes lay a stretch of barren, desolate hills. Winding and twisting, the motor road climbed from one crest to another, and the black sedan laboured slowly up the sharp rises. This was not the first time that Liu Sze-yang had been here, and he recognized some of the landmarks. In about ten more minutes, they would arrive at Chatzetung. A few more hilltops, a tattoo on the bamboo clappers and he would be back in his militant "home."

A little mountain stream, so clear that one could see the stones in its depths, ran alongside the highway. The black car stopped by a stone bridge where the road crossed the stream. Not far from the bridge was a dark pool — the source of the stream — replenished by clear, cold water cascading over a cliff. Behind it, lofty peaks pierced the clouds.

"Get out!" The agents escorting him stood around the car as if carrying out a dangerous mission. Stainless steel handcuffs, marked MADE IN USA, hampered Liu Sze-yang's movements, so that it took him some time to remove his bedding-roll from the car.

This place was very isolated. It was cut off by mountains on three sides, those on both flanks sloping down towards the pool. In the basin-like hollow stood a huge white building, backed by a jumbled mass of rocky cliffs. On a tree-less hilltop rose a fortified tower, its loopholes overlooking the whole valley. The heights and slopes were dotted with camouflaged pillboxes.

Liu Sze-yang wondered where he was as he looked at the white building. For fear that the prisoners might escape, the enemy had whitewashed all the rocks and trees around it, so that there was no place to hide even on the darkest night. The surrounding walls were as high as those at Chatzetung and even stronger, and electrified wire was strung along the top. Another secret concentration camp! Maybe this was the fearful Pai House he had heard about.

Guns in hand, the agents escorted Liu Sze-yang up the mountainside. The stoneflagged steps were steep and his heart pounded from the exertion: a year of prison life had weakened him. He hoped that this was Pai House, and that he would find the comrade named Chi.

A huge iron gate loomed up before them. Over it was a sign in ancient writing: Fragrant Mountain Villa. Liu Sze-yang was reassured. This was indeed Pai House. Fragrant Mountain was the pen-name of the Tang Dynasty poet Pai Chu-yi. How incongruous that a concentration camp should be given such a poetic name.

The heavy iron gate was closed. To one side, some brutal-faced secret agents in American military uniforms were waiting at the door of an office. They searched him expertly, and, as at Chatzetung, registered his name, age and serial number. The only difference was that instead of the blue crosses used at Chatzetung, the prison uniform here had triangles sewn on the back and left front. He noticed English lettering on the register — SACO.

With a few sweeps of the razor, the prison barber shaved off Liu Sze-yang's long hair, but did not touch the beard which he had kept after being put under house arrest. A little side door in the high wall was opened, revealing a landing between two flights of stairs, one leading up and the other down — an arrangement that made it easy for the warders to keep an eye on what was happening. Before he had time to look around, Liu Sze-yang was pushed up the stairs. Here was a wide passage-way running around the cells with agents on guard

at every angle. Liu Sze-yang was hustled into a small room in the left-hand corner of the building. The iron door was closed and locked behind him. The ten-pound leg irons around his ankles hampered his movements and he could not distinguish anything in the darkness after coming out of the bright sunshine. He stood still for a moment, collecting himself, and gradually he became aware of a pair of eyes staring at him.

A young man was standing in front of him. He was of medium height and solid build, and his square face was stamped with stubborn pride. Several shining scars on his temples increased the dogged inflexibility of his appearance. His penetrating gaze held unmistakable suspicion. It would seem this man did not welcome a companion in his solitary confinement.

They looked at each other searchingly, and Liu Sze-yang read the question in the other's eyes: Friend or enemy?

"My name is Liu Sze-yang."

"Mine is Cheng Kang," the other replied coldly.

Cheng Kang! The prisoners at Chatzetung had mentioned him. They had said he had been severely tortured many times, that his whereabouts were unknown, and it was thought that he had probably died long ago. Who would have imagined that they would meet here!

Liu Sze-yang felt as if he had found a brother. The two of them would fight shoulder to shoulder. Through Cheng Kang he would be able to find Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan quickly and safely, and then he could report to the Party organization on how the secret agents had tried to trick information out of him. His recent experience was clear proof that the enemy were racking their brains and frequently changing their tactics in an unceasing effort to destroy the Party Underground and the Party organizations in the prisons.

Liu Sze-yang was troubled by all sorts of worries and anxieties because of this. He tried to strike up a conversation with Cheng Kang several times, but the latter remained cold and aloof. Obviously his complicated struggle had made him ex-

tremely cautious and he did not want to become too friendly before finding out more about the newcomer.

Their desultory remarks soon gave way to silence. The atmosphere in the little cell grew stiff and oppressive.

"He's rather stubborn," thought Liu Sze-yang. How could they get to know each other if not through conversation? And here he was in such a hurry to report his important information to the Party!

It was on the tip of his tongue to say: "Cheng Kang, do you know that when you were printing the *Forward*, I was the person copying down the Hsinhua News Agency broadcasts? We are old comrades-in-arms." Why not come straight out and introduce himself? But he restrained himself as he saw that it would be no use. Cheng Kang would need more than that before he'd trust him. Here people had to make new appraisals of each other. They learned to understand and trust one another only in the course of their new life and struggles.

Liu Sze-yang's recent experiences had instilled in him a burning desire for vengeance, yet now, he could not even give vent to his feelings with a comrade. This was a bitterness he had never tasted before.

Dusk gathered, and night soon fell on this unfamiliar prison. It was dark in the cell, and Liu Sze-yang could hardly distinguish anything. A pale yellowish gleam came through the window, the bars throwing their shadows across the uneven floor. They undulated gently, as if they were cast not by iron but by light airy ribbons that the least breath of wind would carry away. Where did the light come from? Was it moonlight seeping through the clouds, or a lamp in one of the pillboxes? Behind the strangely-shaped rocks of the bluff at the back of the building the mountain brook was gurgling, sounding clearer and closer than it did by day. Sometimes it ran louder and sometimes softer, but it never stopped. When one became accustomed to it, one did not hear it any more.

Liu Sze-yang listened in the silence of the cell to the midnight wind moaning over the barren mountains. He was

quieter now. In his half-sleep he saw himself sitting under deep green pines beside a waterfall, watching the branches swaying in the wind. . . . Again he lived through the recent past. . . . The agent appearing at the grating, the cell door opening, his name being called out, the pale, agitated faces of his comrades, their ardent handclasps and silent farewells. . . . He would never forget them. They too were probably awake tonight, whispering among themselves, wondering about his fate. One by one, the faces of the prisoners at Chatzetung rose before him. Maybe he would never again see the comrades, with whom he had shared life and death. Far away, a pair of big, bright eyes full of love and pain gazed at him. Suddenly their expression changed, and the eyes of that midnight intruder who had come over the wall of his home were boring through him.

Patrolling sentries approached the window from different directions. Loud challenges and the clicking of rifle bolts followed. Then the sentries exchanged some remarks. Liu Sze-yang was curious to hear what they were saying, but they were too far away.

The footsteps of the sentries gradually receded. The soughing of the wind and the rushing of the mountain stream continued.

"Why don't you sleep?" asked Cheng Kang in a low voice.

Liu Sze-yang was drawn back to the present.

"I can't."

There was a cold, heavy clank as Cheng Kang shifted his fetters. His voice came indifferently out of the darkness. "What are you thinking about?"

"I was thinking. . . ." Liu Sze-yang did not know how to voice his feelings, so he said simply: " . . . about the comrades at Chatzetung."

Cheng Kang did not reply. He lay silently on his pallet while Liu Sze-yang sat up, staring into the void.

All was quiet in the building when Liu Sze-yang woke up in the morning. His gaze wandered over the blank ceiling. There was no morning singing, nor the familiar voices of his

comrades studying aloud — nothing that breathed of life. The murmuring of the mountain stream was the only sound breaking the stillness. Pai House was very different from Chatzetung. Liu Sze-yang had noticed that when he arrived the day before, and this impression had grown stronger since then. Over the past year, he had come to see everything through the eyes of the prisoners at Chatzetung. He now felt that Pai House was entirely lacking in the fighting spirit that characterized Chatzetung. There wasn't even the drumming on the bamboo clappers which so disturbed the prisoners at night.

Exercise time came. Liu Sze-yang picked up his heavy fetters and shuffled out towards the railing at the head of the stairs. He wanted to examine the surroundings of the prison, but the high walls obstructed his vision. The only things he could see through the electrified wire fence were distant mountain peaks. The walls enclosed a courtyard containing this house and another row of lower buildings. Over one of the doors of the latter was a sign with the words: Administrative Office. Beside it was the dark mouth of a tunnel which passed underneath the building. A few stunted saplings stood in the courtyard. They could not draw much nourishment from the stony soil, yet they grew and their delicate branches had produced tender green leaves. It was almost as if someone had broken them from a bigger tree and stuck them in the rock. Liu Sze-yang glanced at the reactionary slogans daubed on the walls. They exhorted: "Train your mind with the Three People's Principles. Model your conduct on the Three People's Principles. Limit your speech to the Three People's Principles." Other big words said: "Unity of Thought!" "Use the Three People's Principles to wipe out Marxism-Leninism!" Liu Sze-yang turned away disdainfully.

The yard was deserted.

After a while, a queer-looking old man entered silently. His hair was snow-white, and except for a pair of vacant eyes, his face was completely hidden behind a thick grey bristling beard. He trotted mechanically around the courtyard on his skinny

black feet. This was probably the old madman Elder Brother had told him about.

A little later, several barefooted and emaciated men ambled into the courtyard. They set one foot ahead of the other as if impelled by mere force of habit. Their eyes were dull. No one spoke, no one looked around. They rarely raised their heads, and gave the newcomer upstairs an indifferent glance at best, as if they were hardly aware of his presence. The exception was a young man who was watering the little trees with a clay pot. He looked at Liu Sze-yang for a fleeting moment — by accident, one might have thought. He showed no other sign of interest.

This place was really icy. Liu Sze-yang knew what life in prison was like, but whether at the Second Department or at Chatzetung, he had felt the warm concern of countless comrades. A slip of paper, a few encouraging words, a fleeting smile or some brave lines written in a dark corner of a cell — all this had made him feel part of a group and had kept away loneliness and boredom. But since setting foot in Pai House he had felt desperately lonely. There had been the cold reception from Cheng Kang, and now — what distressed him even more — these wooden and expressionless faces in the yard. Many years of prison life had apparently deprived them of the ability to laugh or smile.

Both Pai House and Chatzetung were SACO concentration camps, yet they were quite different. There were fewer prisoners in Pai House, but their cases were regarded as more serious. They calculated time not by the day or the month, but by the year. Many of those pale, enfeebled men had been brought to this living tomb eight or ten years ago. Perhaps they had long ago lost all hope of freedom.

Could such a place have a Party organization? Liu Sze-yang found it hard to believe that the struggle could be as intense here as it was at Chatzetung.

After a few days of quiet observation, Liu Sze-yang realized that the situation at Pai House was extremely complicated. The

prisoners were few in number, but of many different types. In the next cell, for instance, was Huang Yi-sheng, a giant of a man who had been a general of the Kuomintang's Northeastern Army. He was addressed as Mr. Huang by the warders and given preferential treatment. He spoke very little, and he spent a great deal of time leaning against the railings or pacing up and down the corridor with the mechanical steps of a military man. When he reached one end, he would come to attention, about-turn, and walk back with the same precise strides. He had two cats, a big one and a little one, which he often carried in his arms, stroking them and gently murmuring "puss, puss, puss." He had not spoken to Liu Sze-yang and probably had little contact with Cheng Kang. The only time he exchanged a few words with them was when one of the cats disappeared. He happened to pass their window as he searched for it and he asked them if they had seen his pet.

Liu Sze-yang often saw a small boy with Huang Yi-sheng. The child had a slight, frail body, but his head was big and round. Intelligence seemed to shine from his eyes. Whose child was he? What was he doing in this concentration camp? He did not look like the son of a secret agent; his clothes were too ragged. Every day, he walked into Huang Yi-sheng's cell, swaying his big head and carrying books under his arms. Liu Sze-yang saw him several times, but, this strange child was not frightened by his fetters. On the contrary, one day he came up to the door, stood on tiptoe and thrust his big, round head through the hole of the door.

"Are you from Chatzetung?" he asked boldly.

Liu Sze-yang was astonished. How could the child know?

"Just look at yourself!" the child laughed. "What a long beard you have! You must have been at Chatzetung for six months at least!"

Liu Sze-yang was greatly astonished by the child's deduction.

"I'll come to play with you in a day or two. I have to go for my lesson with Uncle Huang now," said the child. He ran to

the next cell, and before knocking on the door, turned around and made the cryptic remark: "Cheng Kang is my friend!"

Then there was another odd prisoner, a man of about fifty years old. His back was twisted, and he walked with a pronounced limp. A graduate of the third class of Whampoa Military Academy, he had once been the commander of Chiang Kai-shek's personal bodyguards and one of his favourite henchmen. But someone had accused him of plotting to assassinate the "Old Man," as the agents called Chiang Kai-shek. He had, subsequently, been arrested and beaten into a wreck by his inquisitors. That was more than fourteen years ago. Now he was one of the oldest "political prisoners" at Pai House. Maybe the "Old Man" would still have some use for him one day, for he too received special treatment from the enemy agents. He knew better than anyone else what was going on outside, as he spent most of his time by the railings gossiping with the warders. Whenever he met Cheng Kang or Liu Sze-yang coming out for exercise, he would sidle up to them and make small talk or air his grievances. He also went around reading hands, boasting that there was nothing he didn't know about palmistry. The last few nights he had made a big hit with the warders by telling their fortunes, and his cackling laughter could be heard through the walls of his cell.

Practically all the men on the upper floors were "political" prisoners, who received preferential treatment. Maybe that little boy did too, but not Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang, although they lived next to the others. They had heard that some important personages were imprisoned on the left side of this floor. Among them was a major general of the MIB, the former warden of the Sian Concentration Camp. Some said that he was here because political prisoners under his charge had escaped. However, Liu Sze-yang never saw this high-ranking agent.

General Yang Hu-cheng and his young son were kept in a cell on the top floor. They had been brought in secretly and under heavy guard about six months previously. The agents

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never permitted them to come downstairs. The General's secretary Sung Chi-yun and Sung's wife were kept in a cell on the ground floor and were not allowed to see the general.

About a hundred Communists were imprisoned on the ground floor. More than two thousand had been held in Pai House at one time or another, but these were all that remained. The rest had been murdered on dark nights, either on the pine-covered mountain slopes, or in the acid tank nearby. There was no record of many of these revolutionaries, not even their names.

Agents of the MIB who had violated "discipline" were imprisoned in the same cells as the Communists. These men's ranks varied between lieutenant and colonel, and they still carried out a special mission. They kept a day-and-night watch over the Communists in their cells and secretly informed on their activities.

Liu Sze-yang would not have minded being under constant watch if he could have been with his comrades. But either because it was too crowded, or because the secret agents were deliberately isolating him and Cheng Kang, they were never allowed to go downstairs. They seemed to be completely cut off from their comrades and any source of news.

This was real hell — Communists, Kuomintang members and even secret agents all locked up together. It would be very difficult to unite with one's comrades and struggle against the enemy under such conditions. The smallest action held the risk of immediate exposure or of being informed against.

Liu Sze-yang had become more and more unhappy and restless over the past week. How could he do any work for the Party under such conditions? Day after day passed in suffocating, unchanging monotony. For some reason, Cheng Kang did not seem to be affected. He was cooler and steadier than Liu Sze-yang, although the secret agents came to get him almost every day for questioning.

During the ten-minute yard breaks, Liu Sze-yang would eagerly observe the comrades downstairs, hoping to be given

some sign or for something out of the ordinary to happen. He was always disappointed.

When Cheng Kang spoke to him, Liu Sze-yang could tell that his mind was on something else by the way he would often stop talking in the middle of a sentence. Cheng Kang was always suspicious and on his guard, and he seemed to be straining his thoughts on some complicated and pressing problem. Liu Sze-yang could never make up his mind whether or not these thoughts concerned him.

Cheng Kang had again been taken out by a warder that morning. He had not returned at noon. Liu Sze-yang was seriously worried about him, and wondered why Cheng Kang was always being taken out.

He came back at last, and walked into the cell without saying a word. The warder who escorted him in threw a packet of medicated cotton-wool and some medicines on the floor, then locked the door. Cheng Kang seemed utterly exhausted. He reeled drunkenly towards his pallet and collapsed. He instantly fell asleep, his legs still sprawled out on the floor.

Puzzled, Liu Sze-yang lifted Cheng Kang onto the pallet. Even the clank of the fetters did not wake him. What had happened? Had his tortures caused an internal injury? He felt Cheng Kang's forehead, but his temperature was normal and there were no new wounds on his body. Concerned and bewildered, Liu Sze-yang covered Cheng Kang with the blanket.

"Is Cheng Kang back?" The little round-headed boy had suddenly appeared at the cell door. He looked silently for a moment at the sleeping Cheng Kang, then thrust his hands into his pockets and walked off.

Cheng Kang slept through supper time. Liu Sze-yang called him but he did not wake up. His breathing was slow and weak. Liu Sze-yang examined his body thoroughly and tapped his knee. His legs did not move. Even the conditioned reflexes of his nervous system seemed to have disappeared.

The waning light of dusk filtered through the bars of the window. Deeply troubled, Liu Sze-yang sat beside his comrade.

It was late at night when Cheng Kang rolled over and gradually came round.

"Cheng Kang," asked Liu Sze-yang anxiously, "how are you?"

Cheng Kang did not reply. A long time later he said in a low voice: "You go to sleep."

He relapsed into silence again, and Liu Sze-yang reluctantly returned to his own pallet.

Cheng Kang still lay motionless. A cool mountain breeze blew in through the window driving away his drowsiness. He was now quite awake and could hear Liu Sze-yang tossing restlessly. As time slipped by in the dark, he went over his experiences of the day.

The agent had escorted him to a car, which drove off into the depths of the pine forests. The enemy had been questioning and torturing him for a year now without relaxing, but today was the first time he had been taken outside Pai House. All previous cross-examinations had taken place in the sinister underground electric torture chamber behind the offices. Cheng Kang wondered in an offhand way what trials he might have to face this time. Well, come what may, they would not force a single word out of him!

"Peace talks are being held," said the agent in low tones, "so you can't go out with those scars on your body."

What was the enemy going to do? Treat his wounds? Hardly likely. The agents had recently been employing many new interrogation techniques. They had tried hypnotism. They had tacked coloured pictures all around the room in an attempt to disturb his mental balance. If hypnotism is to be effective, the subject must co-operate with the hypnotist, and Cheng Kang had deliberately refused to pay the slightest attention to the agent who tried to dictate his actions. The day before yesterday the agents had brought a lie detector to the electric torture chamber. Cheng Kang had caught sight of the American label on the equipment: General Electric Company. 1948. The subject was strapped to this apparatus, and if he told a lie,

fluctuations appeared on the cardiograph which registered his heart beat. But Cheng Kang had told nothing but the truth. "I'm a Communist. I will never sell out the revolution." The agents had nothing on their recording machines. Today a sharper and more complicated struggle lay in store for him; of this Cheng Kang had no doubt.

"Don't be so suspicious," said the agent. "Acting President Li has already given the order to release political prisoners. Everyone outside knows you're to be set free."

"Humph!" Cheng Kang merely looked at the agent. He had nothing to say to him. Let the enemy bring out their dirty devices.

The car stopped in a garden deep in the forest. Before them stood a handsome Western-style building which looked like a hospital. Escorted by the agent, Cheng Kang walked up the steps into the building. Once inside, their feet made no sound on the thick, soft carpet on the wide staircase. All the walls were spotlessly white and gilt lamps hung overhead.

"Silence please" read a sign in English at the head of the stairs. The secret agent told him: "This is a special SACO hospital."

Cheng Kang made no comment. He was hustled past windows opening on to the dense green pines which hid the building. The scent of flowers floated in, but a hushed silence reigned inside.

Cheng Kang stepped into a bright room. An operating table stood in the centre of the floor. The walls were lined with glass cabinets containing medicine bottles and instruments. A gleaming aluminum sterilizer stood beside an open door, and over the operating table was a shadowless surgical lamp of the latest type. Wide plate-glass windows let in the sunlight which, percolating through the interlaced pine-branches, threw a cool green reflection on the wall.

A man in a white surgical gown stepped forward. He had a bony, wizened face, and a pair of rat-like eyes. A sharp pointed chin did nothing to improve his odious appearance.

He was about to say something to Cheng Kang, who was standing stiffly before him, but he changed his mind. Instead he asked the agent guarding the door: "Is this the patient?"

"I'm no patient," Cheng Kang snapped. "I don't want any treatment from you."

The doctor's fleshless lips curled in a smile.

"Mine is a lofty profession. I do not concern myself with politics," he said in his high-pitched voice, trying to win Cheng Kang's confidence. "Please lie down and let me examine your wounds."

Cheng Kang did not move. He wanted no treatment.

"Please," the doctor gestured towards the operating table. "Don't be afraid."

"Me, afraid?" retorted Cheng Kang, angrily sitting down on the operating table. "I'm merely curious to see what tricks you'll try out this time!"

The doctor smiled thinly, as with swift movements, he loosened Cheng Kang's prison uniform.

"Oh dear! Your wounds are infected." There seemed to be a trace of sympathy in his eyes. He put his stethoscope against Cheng Kang's chest and listened to his heart and lungs, then felt his pulse and took his blood pressure. Cheng Kang, indifferent to what was happening, looked out of the window, occasionally turning to watch the doctor. The sleek hair near his chest reeked of scented pomade and nauseated him.

Iodine was swabbed on the infected wounds on Cheng Kang's chest. He clenched his teeth to bear the stinging pain without frowning. These wounds were the result of burns inflicted on him in the electric torture chamber. Of the many wounds he had received during repeated interrogations, some had already healed, leaving discoloured marks, while others had gone septic and not got better.

"Your injuries are quite serious," said the doctor with a hint of pity in his voice, as if implying that he was a kind-hearted man and worked in this hell-hole only because he was forced to do so. "It will be difficult to remove the scars.

However, by using the newest American techniques, it may be possible. . . ."

Shaking his head, he sprinkled the inflamed wounds with some white powder. Cheng Kang gathered from the English lettering on the bottle that it was sulfa powder. Then the doctor painted his chest with gentian violet and taped on vaseline-coated strips of gauze.

"They'll heal in a few days."

"Yes, treat my wounds so that you can torture me again!" Cheng Kang smiled sardonically, as he started to get up.

"Just a minute!" The doctor's rat-like eyes screwed up in a smile as he held up a phial. "This is penicillin, the American wonder drug. I'll give you a shot of it to stop the infection."

He walked over to a cabinet and drew the contents of the phial into a syringe.

Tying a rubber tourniquet around Cheng Kang's arm, the doctor skilfully inserted the needle into one of the gradually swelling veins. His thumb slowly bore down on the plunger, gradually forcing the liquid into Cheng Kang's blood stream.

Cheng Kang became aware of a cold sensation at the base of his spine. Slowly it crept upwards until it reached his neck. It continued to rise, and soon his brain felt like a block of ice. Everything wavered and blurred before his eyes. At this very moment Cheng Kang noticed the doctor turn his head towards an open door and whisper in English: "Doctor, this is a concentrate. Will 5 cc. be sufficient?"

"Yes, it's enough," came a dry harsh voice from the door.

A behind-the-scenes director is hidden there! thought Cheng Kang. He had a faint perception of the tourniquet being loosened and again being strapped onto his other arm. . . .

"Count! One — two — three. . . ."

Count? Cheng Kang was astonished. Only patients under general anaesthesia were asked to count. His brain was still frozen, but the awareness that an unknown peril menaced him broke through his semi-stupor. It was not penicillin that the enemy had injected. Penicillin was measured in international

units — one hundred thousand, two hundred thousand units — but the doctor had said 5 cc. . . . and wanted him to count off numbers with him. This was no treatment! The doctor had given him some sort of anaesthetic! Cheng Kang was enraged. He wanted to shout, he wanted to denounce violently this vile agent. He would not let the enemy do as they pleased with him. He wanted to get up and show them up for what they were!

His muscles, however, no longer responded. He could not utter a sound, nor move a finger. His body had ceased to exist, and his limbs and senses were gone, leaving only a solitary, intoxicated brain floating like a cloud in empty space.

"Repeat after me: Thirteen . . . fourteen . . . fifteen. . . ."

The doctor's voice became distant and trailed off.

"He's asleep!"

"Yes . . . he's completely under."

But Cheng Kang could still hear. Hazily, he recognized the harsh voice of the man behind the door.

"Cheng Kang! Cheng Kang!"

Who was that calling him? Cheng Kang pressed his lips together. He would not reply.

"The drug has taken effect . . . the latest achievement of American science!"

Indistinctly, the auditory nerves carried the sound to his brain. Cheng Kang did not know what they had injected in him, but he fought to resist it. He knew that he had to keep his faculties and stay conscious. Cheng Kang struggled desperately to hold on to his slipping senses. At last his mind cleared somewhat. He became aware of his own existence again. He knew that he was still lying on the operating table, and that U.S.-Chiang agents were standing over him.

Someone was drawing the curtains. The room darkened, and Cheng Kang was aware that something had been placed between himself and the pines outside.

"Keep absolutely silent!"

Cheng Kang perceived that the rat-eyed doctor had addressed

this remark to a number of ghostly figures who had slipped in while he had been semi-conscious.

Something tinkled in a metal tray. It must be the syringe. So, the injection was only just over. Cheng Kang felt reassured and glad that he still retained his powers of judgment. He became calmer, but could not forget those terrible words: "He's completely under. . . . The medicine has taken effect. . . . American science. . . ." Cheng Kang now fully realized the danger he was in and with every fibre of his being fought the icy sensation in his brain. On no account must he slide below the threshold of consciousness the enemy wanted him to.

"Cheng Kang! Cheng Kang!"

Was he imagining things? This voice was so warm and so friendly. Cheng Kang wanted to hear it again, but the voice receded.

"Cheng Kang, this is Hsu Yun-feng. . . ."

The illusion gradually took shape. Led on by the voice, Cheng Kang had the feeling that Lao Hsu was sitting beside him. He was handing him a letter from his elder brother.... Then he saw him as on the day of their parting.... Then Lao Hsu was telling the enemy that he himself led the *Forward.* Yes, he and Lao Hsu were standing together at the Second Department, facing the enemy.... All at once, Cheng Kang remembered that Lao Hsu had been arrested. It could not be Lao Hsu who was speaking to him now. The realization of the danger he was in came like an electric shock. He opened his eyes to glare in fury at this agent in disguise.

Scarcely two seconds had passed from the time he had been thinking of Lao Hsu until he opened his eyes, yet in that instant a welter of memories, associations, analyses and deductions had sped through his mind. Influenced by the drug, Cheng Kang's brain now seemed to react with lightning speed. The medicine seemed to simultaneously have an anaesthetic and a stimulating effect on the nerve cells of his brain. His mind was crowded with hallucinations, his responses were acutely heightened and his ability to resist impulses was

lowered. If he relaxed his vigilance or lost control of himself even for one fleeting instant, he would answer any question put to him and pour out all his secrets.

A tall weedy figure in a white surgical gown appeared. Cheng Kang strained to see and made out a man with thin flaxen hair and sunken slate-coloured eyes above an amazingly prominent beak of a nose. This white-skinned foreigner was gesturing with his hairy hand, giving directions. The doctor blinked his rat-like eyes and his thin lips moved slightly.

"This is Hsu Yun-feng. Cheng Kang, I am Lao Hsu!"

Cheng Kang realized that the enemy did not know he had seen through their scheme. One of the white-gowned figures handed Rat-eyes a sheet of paper. It obviously contained questions prepared beforehand, for Rat-eyes kept his eyes on it while he spoke. So none of these people were really doctors! They were a new type of secret agents in doctor's guise, bred by the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries. Fierce indignation swept over Cheng Kang, and his anger reduced the freezing sensation in his brain. Cheng Kang struggled to clear his mind further and to understand what the secret agent was driving at.

"If I'm unable to come, Cheng Kang, do you remember where to send the *Forward*?"

In a moment of lucidity, Cheng Kang decided to answer the enemy.

"You said I must wait for you to come and get it yourself."

"Do you know the address? The address of the underground Party organization?"

"Address? The underground Party organization? Don't you know it?"

"No, tell me the most secret one!"

It was the Chinese agent who was questioning him, but the dazed Cheng Kang had the impression that the grey-eyed foreigner was speaking.

"The most secret address is yours," Cheng Kang's voice was slurred, and hallucinations began crowding into his brain once more.

"Do you know the most important address? What if you should be in urgent need of contacting the Party?"

The slate-coloured eyes of the blond-haired devil seemed to push their way insistently into his thoughts. Cheng Kang felt an irresistible urge to reply, almost as if another being in his brain were goading him into it. His lips were ready to form the answer: "I'd go to number 318 Linsen Road." Then suddenly it flashed into his mind that this was a Party secret. He must not tell anyone Li Ching-yuan's address. His heart tightened and clarity flooded back into his mind. At the last moment he substituted the words: "As printer of *Forward* I have no contact with anyone!"

"The prisoners at Chatzetung have made contact with the Party Underground in Chungking. What about you people in Pai House?"

The slate-eyed man came once more within his line of vision. He merely made a few gestures, but Cheng Kang felt that he was more fiendish and sinister than the agent who was doing the talking.

"There's no need to get in touch; the warders tell us we may be set free...." Cheng Kang's voice gradually trailed off.

"Cheng Kang! Cheng Kang!" the rat-eyed doctor called urgently.

"Let's get on with it!" came the harsh voice of the foreigner.

"How was the news that General Yang Hu-cheng is imprisoned at Pai House sent out?"

"Is Yang Hu-cheng at Pai House? Why have I never seen him?"

Cheng Kang felt that he was replying to the slate-eyed man. His head was aching ferociously, but with an immense effort he controlled his thoughts and kept answering.

After some time Cheng Kang lost interest. His brain was becoming numb and he let some of the questions pass unanswered.

The agents were unwilling to stop, and they continued the

interrogation. Cheng Kang's head began to ache acutely. He had felt a few intermittent pains immediately after the injection, and now they were recurring at ever shorter intervals. He no longer wanted to talk. The drug had over-stimulated Cheng Kang's nervous system, and now that the effect was wearing off, his brain was utterly spent. Still the agent questioned him, but Cheng Kang shouted angrily: "Clear off!"

"All right, Cheng Kang, I'll be going now. Goodbye," the enemy agent said reluctantly.

"What? Is that all there is to it?" exclaimed one of the bystanders.

"The effect of the drug has worn off. He's asleep. That's all the reliable information we can get this time."

"Give him another shot!"

"Too much of it would build up a resistance in him, and it would lose some of its effectiveness! Isn't that what you taught us, doctor?"

"Quite so," replied the foreigner.

"The results are satisfactory. He has given us a lot of information. An analysis will provide us with valuable intelligence," said Rat-eyes.

"But he didn't reveal a single address!"

"Silence!" The foreigner's sharp command put a stop to these embarrassing and incautious remarks.

Cheng Kang dully sensed a slight distention of the muscles on his arm. Opening his eyes with an effort, he saw the foreigner bending over him giving him another injection.

Were they starting all over again? Alarm rose in Cheng Kang. Then he calmed himself. No matter how many shots they gave him, he would not talk.

Feeling returned to his arm....

"The American doctor is giving him a sedative, otherwise he may fall into a coma," Rat-eyes was explaining to another secret agent. The figures who had crowded around him gradually disappeared through the doorway. The cold sensation in Cheng Kang's brain was lessening.... He slowly regained

his faculties. Smouldering with rage, he glared at the American.

"You have had an acute reaction to the penicillin," Rat-eyes said. "This is an unusual phenomenon, rarely heard of in medical circles. It may be due to your heart being weakened by an excess of torture.... If the American doctor hadn't taken timely measures, you might have ceased to breathe while you were unconscious! Thanks to the doctor's superb skill and great experience you have been brought back from death!"

Angrily, Cheng Kang turned his head towards the window whose curtains had been drawn back again.

The American doctor had gone to the medicine cabinet by the wall. He stood there guiltily, like a thief caught red-handed, and poured medicine from one bottle into another.

"People frequently have hallucinations while in a coma.... Did you see anything?"

"I saw nothing," shouted Cheng Kang, "except ghouls and ghosts who don't dare show their faces in broad daylight!"

"Do you feel better?" asked the American doctor with an uncomfortable smile, holding out a large package containing cotton-wool, bandages, iodine and mercurochrome.

"The doctor sympathizes with you very much," said Rat-eyes, quickly taking the package which Cheng Kang refused to touch. "This treatment is entirely free of charge. You won't have to pay for the medicines. He's doing this out of his love of humanity!"

Cheng Kang's fury rose until it threatened to overflow. He wanted to cut short this hypocritical prattle and shout at these beasts! But he checked himself. Why waste his energies quarrelling with these butchers: He might as well play the lute to a cow. He flung one terse sentence at them: "Tell him *I'll never forget his shameless 'love of humanity.'*"

20

LIU Sze-yang became Cheng Kang's assistant. He joined the prisoners' collective activities, strictly abiding by the principles of underground work.

The weather was beautiful, harmonizing with his feelings. Like a fair wind scattering dark clouds, a slip of paper had dispelled Liu Sze-yang's gloom. Happily he plunged into the new struggle together with his comrades.

He looked out of the window, his head pressed against the iron bars. Today he did not notice how hard and cold they were. He could not control the agitated beating of his heart. At last he was taking part in the secret struggle at Pai House!

Yesterday, during exercise time, Cheng Kang had remained in the cell on the excuse that his feet hurt. But Liu Sze-yang was not convinced that Cheng Kang's feet were the reason for his wanting to be alone in the cell. There must be something he wished to do in secret. Liu Sze-yang thought unhappily about how suspicious Cheng Kang was; he did not even have faith in his own comrades. When Liu Sze-yang returned from exercise, these thoughts still rankled. This cell seemed to belong to Cheng Kang alone. With lowered eyes, he shut the door. Turning round, he found himself looking into a pair of friendly, trusting eyes. How he had longed for such a comradely look in Cheng Kang's eyes, the look that only exists between comrades who understand and trust each other implicitly! After Cheng Kang's initial coolness, Liu Sze-yang had hardly expected to gain his understanding so quickly and easily.

Cheng Kang had become a different person. His cold look was gone now; warmth and enthusiasm shone from his face. He handed Liu Sze-yang a slip of paper with a smile.

"This came from downstairs," he said with suppressed excitement.

Liu Sze-yang took the slip. Who had written it? What did it say? He could hear his heart pounding. He unfolded the paper and read the few pencilled words:

"The newcomer is reliable."

At last they had accepted him! Eagerly Liu Sze-yang asked: "Was this written by a certain Comrade Chi?"

"Right, Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan."

"I have a message for him!"

"It can be sent," nodded Cheng Kang with a smile. "Let's talk first. . . ."

With indescribable elation, Liu Sze-yang rolled the slip into a little ball and swallowed it. In this hell-hole that was as quiet as a stagnant pool on the surface he had at last come upon the collective. His heart glowed with a great warmth, such as he had felt on the day he joined the Party.

"Cheng Kang!" Liu Sze-yang could restrain himself no longer. "Do you know we've written to each other before? We've been friends a long time already!"

"Ah, was it you?"

"Yes, I was the one. 'Revolutionary greetings!' "

" 'A firm handshake!' "

The two comrades threw their arms around each other. Two hearts burned like one flame. . . .

Cheng Kang was behind him, his back to the window. He had a pencil stub in his hand and was concentrating on writing. Formerly, Cheng Kang had worked alone, only able to write in brief snatches, always keeping eyes and ears open for any signs of danger and hiding the movements of his hands with his body. Now everything was different. It was much more convenient to have two people on the job, in spite of the pair of American handcuffs which had been put on his wrists a few days ago. Liu Sze-yang knew there was a lot to write today, because after his arrival Cheng Kang had cautiously stopped working for many days. He had wanted Cheng Kang to use the fountain-pen

Yu Hsin-chiang had given him, but his cell mate had declined on the ground that a fountain-pen was too noticeable. "Everything here is written in pencil," he had told him. "This stub of indelible pencil I'm using belonged to Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien."

A shadow flickered at the head of the stairs. Someone was coming up. Liu Sze-yang turned his eyes casually towards the mountain peaks and whistled a bird call.

A round head appeared. It was the little boy who had looked in and spoken to him the other day when Cheng Kang was asleep. He had not forgotten the child's accurate deduction that he'd been at Chatzetung for at least six months. Liu Sze-yang was very curious about this child, and he took a good look at him.

"Have you come for your lesson, Little Turnip?" called the warder who usually stood guard at the head of the stairs.

The thick wall obstructed Liu Sze-yang's vision, and he could only hear indistinctly what they were saying.

"Little Turnip, don't you hope that the peace talks will succeed, so that you can go out?"

"Peace talks? They're a fraud! The newspapers have reported where Uncle Yang is held, but he still hasn't been let out!"

"Well, when your father gets out, he'll become a big official. Then people won't call you 'Little Turnip' any more."

"Why not?"

"Then they'll call you Sung Chen-chung — young Master Sung!"

"I'm not a young master!"

Listening to the child's footsteps as he walked away, Liu Sze-yang thought about the child's life. Cheng Kang had told him that Little Turnip's father, Sung Chi-yun, was General Yang Hu-cheng's secretary and the former editor of the Sian *Northwest Culture Daily*. He and his wife had been arrested by the Kuomintang soon after General Yang Hu-cheng was secretly imprisoned. Little Turnip, a newly-born infant, had also been taken to the prison. At first they had been held at the

Hsifeng concentration camp. After the victory of the war against Japan, the whole family had been transferred to Pai House, where they now lived in a damp underground cell. Sung Chi-yun was too weak after his protracted imprisonment to have the energy to educate his little son, and when Little Turnip was six years old, Sung Chi-yun had requested that he be allowed to attend school outside. The agents had refused for fear that the child might spread prison secrets. Later they had grudgingly consented to let Little Turnip have lessons with Huang Yi-sheng upstairs. General Huang taught him to read and write and trained him in manners and morals as well. In the mornings Little Turnip studied Chinese and arithmetic; the afternoons were devoted to Russian and drawing. On Little Turnip's ninth birthday General Huang had presented him with a box of water-colours, and from then on all of Little Turnip's exercise books were gaily decorated.

Under the guidance of the general, who had visited the Soviet Union, Little Turnip had learned to speak Russian. Master and pupil would converse in that language when agents were watching them. This annoyed the agents considerably, but there was nothing they could do about it. The boy had an excellent memory: he could read and write every word in his little pocket dictionary and give its definition as well. Now and then he would even test the grown-ups at Pai House about the meaning of some difficult character.

The chirping of birds in the mountains brought Liu Sze-yang back to the present. Looking up, he saw some thrushes chasing each other. They alighted on a swaying branch, and fluttered their exquisite wings, then went chirping off again. How free they were. Liu Sze-yang could not help envying them.

Iron fetters clanked behind him. He realized that Cheng Kang was sitting up and writing again. Liu Sze-yang remembered that it was his duty to keep watch at the window. If an enemy agent came, he was to cough softly twice, and Cheng Kang would instantly hide the closely-written piece of paper in his mouth.

Cheng Kang wrote in a fluent Sung style, similar to the one he had used for *Forward* in Chungking. After he had written the first issue of *Forward* at Pai House, the comrades downstairs had told him to keep to the same style and always use indelible pencil. Cheng Kang had not understood the reason for this decision, but had obeyed. The current issue would be full of the big news brought by Liu Sze-yang: the victorious Huai-Hai Campaign, the liberation of Peiping and Tientsin, and the Eight Sections and Twenty-four Articles put forward by the Communist Party as the basis for the peace talks. Before this, Cheng Kang had been limited to repeating what had appeared in old copies of *Forward* because of lack of outside information. Liu Sze-yang was astonished that the endless tortures, which could wreck any man's health, had not affected Cheng Kang's memory.

After reading what Cheng Kang had written, Liu Sze-yang made a suggestion.

"Cheng Kang," he said, "I think that the word '*Forward*' should be the title. It stands for the Party and for struggle."

"That won't do."

"Why not?"

"The comrades downstairs don't agree."

Who didn't agree? Chi Hsiao-hsuan? Why shouldn't they use the militant name of the Party's underground paper? Liu Sze-yang was both puzzled and disappointed.

"I put the title and the date and number of the issue on the first one I brought out here, but that was the only time. I was warned by the people downstairs that we could not afford to be careless under the special conditions of the struggle here. If the enemy got hold of the paper, such a title would tell them a great deal about our activities. . . ."

Liu Sze-yang was struck by the realization that there was a group of determined and careful men here who were more experienced than himself, a mere newcomer.

Liu Sze-yang returned to the window. He had to find an outlet for his pent-up emotions, to sing or write a poem. The lines which usually welled up at such moments would not come

today. The strong sense of caution of this collective had fastened its grip on him.

Cheng Kang had finished writing. He folded *Forward* into a narrow strip, then lowered it on a string down a drainpipe beside the window and fastened the other end inside the conduit. It would soon be retrieved by the prisoners downstairs. This means of communications had been used for years, and, for all their cunning, the enemy had never suspected that this metal pipe that was always in view was used for such a purpose.

Mealtime came and someone opened the little side door through which Liu Sze-yang had entered the prison. Two buckets of gruel were brought in by a white-haired old man and not by the usual carrier, the kindly cook.

The old man set down his buckets near the window where Liu Sze-yang was standing. It was the madman with the hairy face whom he had seen trotting around the courtyard a few days ago. Liu Sze-yang thought very little of him, partly because he brought less food than usual.

The madman left, then a warder and Little Turnip came along the walk outside the cells. The boy had probably just come from his lessons. Setting down his books by the railing, he grasped the bars which were just above his head, stood on tiptoe and peered at the hills encircling Pai House.

"Tell me, what's on the other side of the mountains?" the child asked the warder.

"Tsechikou."

"I went there once. But I don't mean that mountain, I mean those under the white clouds."

"That's the north."

"Papa says that our home is in the north."

Little Turnip was about to say something else, but was distracted by an insect with shiny emerald wings which had flown in through the bars. He ran after it, shouting and waving his hands. Stopping in front of Liu Sze-yang's window, he exclaimed jubilantly: "Look! Look!"

On the insect's head was a lovely transparent sheath, like

By Sung Kuang-hsun

one of the gossamer veils girls sometimes wear. It was delicate and beautiful. Beneath the sheath gleamed a pair of tiny red eyes. In the spring, these insects often found their way through the bars, bringing a breath of freedom to the inmates, many of whom had been within the walls for years.

Another one flew in and they crawled round together in front of their audience.

"How pretty," shouted Little Turnip. He stretched out his hand and caught one, but when he reached for the second one, it spread its emerald wings and flew away.

Little Turnip gently cupped his hands over the insect, so that he would not hurt it. Liu Sze-yang groped in his pocket and found an empty matchbox. He threw it out of the window to Little Turnip, who opened it and put in the insect. As he was about to close the box, he noticed that the insect was alarmed. It was afraid of losing its freedom! Thoughtfully, Little Turnip opened the box wide and said softly:

"Fly! Fly away!"

The insect soared through the bars and was soon lost to sight. Little Turnip clapped his hands in glee:

"He's flying, he's flying! He's taking a plane back home!"

He gave the matchbox back to Liu Sze-yang.

"After liberation," he said, "we'll go home on a plane too."

It was pitch dark in the underground cell. Not a single star shone through the barred window. Little Turnip was curled up in his bed, lost in a world of dreams.

He was walking down a road. A warder was taking him to town, just like that year when the Japanese had been defeated, and he had gone with a warder to buy vegetables at Tsechikou. They walked for a long, long time until they came to the edge of a town. Little Turnip had never been in one before, and the only time he had heard the word "town" was when he learned it from his reader. Uncle Huang had told him that a town was a big place with lots of people and many streets. As they came nearer, Little Turnip could see that it was really big. There

were high walls and a massive gate with iron gratings. Electrified wires glowed red-hot on top of the wall. It was terrifying.

The warder showed his pass to a sentry and they went in. The gateway was a long dark tunnel, leading into a street. It looked just like the passageways between the cells at Pai House, narrow and lined with agents, only it had no ceiling and one could see the sky. Rows of houses stood on both sides. All the doors had strips of iron nailed across them and a little square hole one could poke one's head out of.

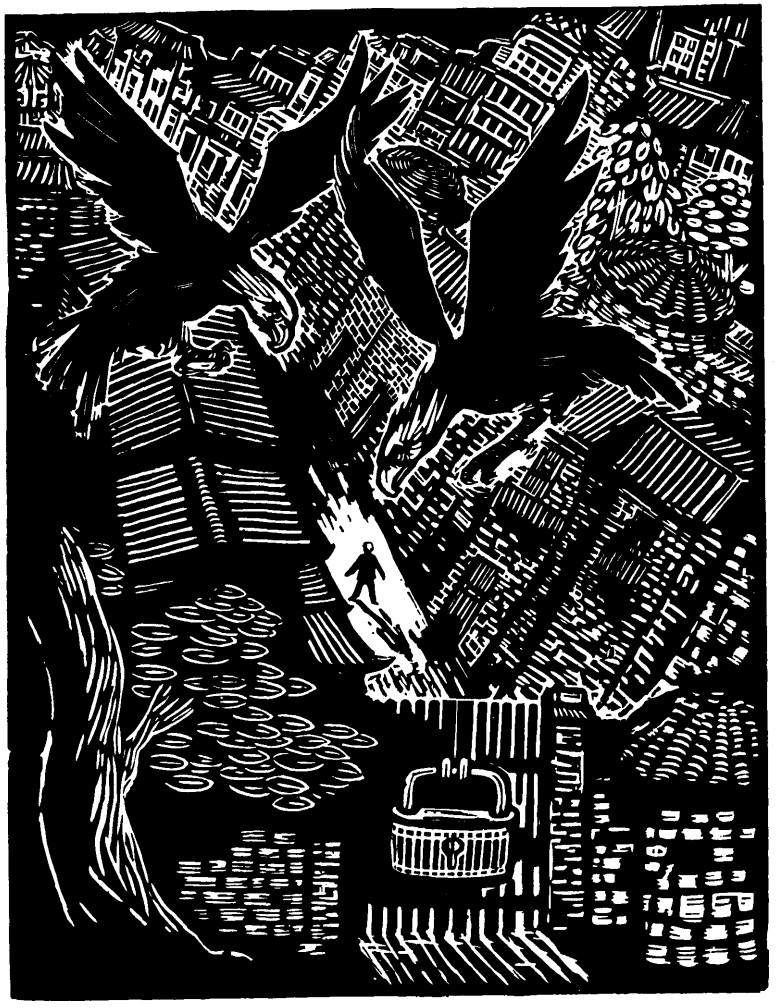
The street was full of people, bumping, jostling and pushing each other as they walked along. All had blue cloth triangles on their clothes. Funny, even the townspeople wore the same uniforms as the prisoners at Pai House!

Little Turnip heard someone shouting: "They're making arrests." The people on the street all disappeared and the doors were locked with big shiny padlocks. Everyone poked their heads through the little square holes and looked up at the sky. Little Turnip looked up too. Hawks were circling in the blue and cloudless sky. Suddenly they swooped downwards. Horror! They weren't hawks, but secret agents with wings. They zoomed back and forth, faster than arrows, throwing black shadows on the streets. Suddenly one of them pounced on a hole in a door, and with sharp, hooked talons dragged a man out of it. The man's eyes dropped out and rolled on the ground like black and white marbles. All of a sudden they stopped and stared up at him! Little Turnip screamed in terror:

"Mummy! Mummy!"

Clutching at his mother, he awoke from his nightmare, his heart thumping and his body drenched in perspiration. His mother patted him gently, and after a long time he went back to sleep again.

The dawn light glimmered faintly through the little window in the stone wall. Little Turnip, only half-awake, heard the cell door open, followed by someone talking to his mother. He sat up. He did not feel rested after his nightmare and his head was heavy. His mother told him to try and get some more



By Niu Wen

sleep, but he didn't want to, because he remembered that there was something he had to do. He took the suit of clean clothes his mother held out to him and put them on.

Little Turnip was nine years old. His head was large but he had a frail, undersized body. Though the clothes he wore had been made by his mother two years ago, they were still too large for him. He just would not grow, and looked like a child of five or six. His hands and feet were very small. Only his head had developed normally, so that it seemed abnormally large and was out of proportion to the rest of his body. Everyone liked to stroke his head, and even his parents called him "Little Turnip." Only his teacher, Huang Yi-sheng, addressed him by his proper name — Sung Chen-chung.

His mother was packing their clothing and other little odds and ends under the eyes of the head-warder. She was very thorough and even his readers were tied in a neat pile. Every thread and all the clothes Little Turnip had worn as a baby, no matter how tattered, were gathered and put together. If she left anything she would never get it back again, and it took quite a bit of patching and mending to keep the family of three clad. Little Turnip liked to help his mother, and had learned a lot from her. He always patched his own clothes himself. He stood watching his mother's slow movements, but did not assist her. He was thinking of many other things.

"Mummy, I want to go out. . . ."

Little Turnip saw from his mother's kind, worn face that she agreed, and he opened the door.

"Don't run, you might fall. Go and say goodbye to Uncle Huang."

"Yes, mum."

Little Turnip ran along the passage outside their cell. It was long and dark, but he knew his way so well that he did not need a light. At the entrance a nuisance of a guard shouted at him, but Little Turnip paid no attention. Without even troubling to turn his head, he made a dash for the staircase. At one of the cell doors he paused and said softly:

"Uncle Chi, I'll come and see you in a few minutes!"

Little Turnip climbed the stairs and stopped in front of Huang Yi-sheng's door. He had been taught to wait for permission before crossing the threshold for his daily lessons. Out of breath from running, he stood a few moments before calling softly in Russian:

"Good morning, Uncle Huang."

The general answered as usual. Maybe he didn't know that today Little Turnip was coming not for a lesson, but to tell him some very important news.

Little Turnip stayed a long time in Uncle Huang's cell. When he came out he was followed by the general.

"Chen-chung, give my regards to your father and Uncle Yang," he said, handing him a book. Little Turnip nodded his head obediently. Clasping the book to his breast he tightly grasped the general's hand.

Little Turnip turned towards the next cell.

When Cheng Kang saw him, he called to him and squatted down behind the bars to talk to him. The child was dressed in neat clean clothes, as if for some special occasion.

"We're leaving." His voice sounded mysterious and excited.

"When?"

"Today."

Cheng Kang looked soberly at Little Turnip: what a wretched childhood he'd had.

"Daddy and Uncle Yang left for Kweichow by plane the day before yesterday," Little Turnip said in a lowered voice. "I'm leaving today with Mummy. Only Uncle Huang isn't going."

"Do you want to leave?"

"No, I don't, but Daddy has already gone and Uncle Yang too. I couldn't get to sleep for a long time last night, and when I did, I had such a nasty dream." Little Turnip told Cheng Kang the details of his terrifying nightmare.

Cheng Kang listened silently. Were these the dreams of a nine-year-old? What fearful shadows must haunt him.

Little Turnip's departure was so sudden. Clearly the enemy

was up to something. Cheng Kang squatted before the child without saying anything. He remembered the first time he had seen him, about a year ago. . . .

The morning after he had arrived in Pai House, Cheng Kang had seen a child at the door of his cell. The child stood there a long time, evidently with no intention of leaving. Cheng Kang looked at him curiously, and the child thrust his head boldly through the hole in the door and asked:

"Hey, what's your name?"

Cheng Kang blinked.

"My name's Cheng Kang. What's yours?"

"I'm Little Turnip!" This innocent reply was so unexpected that Cheng Kang couldn't help laughing. He really did look like a turnip! Then Cheng Kang saw how puny and misshapen he was, and his laughter was silenced.

"Were you tortured?" asked the child.

"No."

Little Turnip's quick eyes had seen the scars on Cheng Kang's face, and he exclaimed, "You're telling a fib!" He stared at him reproachfully and in a tone of command: "Show me your hands!"

Not understanding what he wanted, Cheng Kang stretched out his hands. Little Turnip saw Cheng Kang's twisted fingers, and looked at him with an expression of pain and sadness unnatural in one so young.

"You didn't talk?"

"No."

"Then . . . you're a good man."

The child in all his innocence was able to judge people correctly.

"Are you a Communist?" he asked again.

Cheng Kang did not want to talk to him about such matters, but he could not lie to the child either, so he countered:

"What do you think?"

"Me?" Little Turnip's eyes became round. There was both

trust and joy in his face as he exclaimed. "Ah, I know now!"

"What do you know?"

"I know that you — but I won't say it." Little Turnip replied knowingly. Cheng Kang felt a great liking for this intelligent and lovable boy.

"How long have you been here?" Cheng Kang avoided using that terrible word "locked up."

"Ever since I was a baby. . . ." Instead of talking about himself, he mentioned several well-known Communists. "I knew Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien. They were Communists — leaders! Uncle Lo taught me to read, and made a reader for me. The first lesson was 'I am a good child. I love the Chinese Communist Party.' Only a few years ago they were both. . . . I know some more people downstairs. There's Uncle Chi and many other Communists. When we were at Hsifeng, they used to play with me every day. . . ."

Soon afterwards Little Turnip helped Cheng Kang to make his first contacts with the comrades downstairs. . . .

All these unforgettable memories returned to Cheng Kang.

"Look, I drew this for you." Little Turnip thrust a piece of paper through the bars. "It's a goodbye present."

It was a water-colour painting. An azure sky, rather too blue from too generous an application of colour; half a giant red sun, rising over the golden peaks and bathing the world in its dazzling rays; and bright green forests. In one corner was written in sturdy characters "Li Ming," meaning "Dawn."

The painting was no masterpiece, but the bright blues, reds, greens and yellows gave it a strength. Each brush stroke seemed to be filled with a yearning for freedom.

"The paper was too small, so I couldn't get everything in," Little Turnip explained. He cherished great ambitions in his little heart! Cheng Kang was deeply moved by this picture which symbolized freedom and new life, but he said smilingly:

"Is this Chungking? Look, there isn't any fog. You've painted mid-day, not dawn. You had better change the title."

"No, the sun's just rising," said Little Turnip. "I don't like

fog. You can't see anything through it, so I didn't paint it."

"You couldn't paint fog anyhow," Cheng Kang laughed.

"Yes, I can," replied Little Turnip earnestly. "When I come back from Kweichow, I'll paint some specially for you."

Little Turnip thrust his warm little hand through the hole. "Goodbye, I'm going."

Cheng Kang had a deep affection for this brave child, and his acquaintance with him had been a source of inspiration. He had seen how stubbornly and cleverly the long-imprisoned Communists were bringing him up. How admirable were these comrades who placed their hopes, ideals and aspirations in this child! The greatest enthusiasm and determination had been put into educating this precious little human being. All these thoughts flashed through Cheng Kang's mind at this moment of parting. But he had no time to express them to the child. He must not let him feel the pain of separation. He said nothing as he squeezed the little hand.

"Oh, yes!" said Little Turnip, suddenly remembering. "I've got something to tell you."

"What?"

"Something Uncle Chi asked me to find out. It's very important," said Little Turnip in a hushed tone. "I couldn't do it. . . ."

Cheng Kang anxiously waited for him to go on. He saw that Little Turnip was thinking hard and was somewhat hesitant.

"I should be telling this to Uncle Chi direct, but there are too many people around. When I was coming upstairs, a warder pestered me and wanted to talk to me, but I ran away from him." He finally came to the point: "I'll tell you, and you can tell Uncle Chi."

Cheng Kang nodded and listened carefully.

"A few days ago a very important man was brought here. He's been put in a dark dungeon under our cell. It hasn't got any windows at all. The tunnel to the dungeon is very long — I explored it once when no one was shut in there. It goes through rock and is so narrow and low you can't even stand up

straight. It stinks of mildew so badly it makes you feel sick. You can hear rats squeaking, their eyes gleaming like ghosts. It's really scary."

Cheng Kang heaved a deep sigh. He had never heard of anyone being locked in a dungeon here, nor had he known that such a place existed.

"The man was put there in the middle of the night. The next day I saw pools of blood at the entrance of the tunnel. . . ." Little Turnip's voice became low and guarded. "Uncle Chi says that the man was unconscious when he was dragged in. He wanted me to find out who he is and get in touch with him, but I never got the chance. The warders are watching him very closely. There are two iron doors without any holes. Both were locked, so I couldn't get in. I called to him, but he didn't answer. Last night when I heard we were going to Kweichow, I went to call him again, but he still didn't answer. I couldn't shout any louder, because I was afraid the warders would hear me."

An icy lump formed in the pit of Cheng Kang's stomach as he listened.

"I still haven't found out who he is. I don't even know his name," said Little Turnip, lowering his head apologetically. "Yesterday the warders were too lazy to take the food to the dungeon themselves, so they sent the cook. I saw him take in some wild onions. I wanted to ask him to take a message, but the warders found out about the wild onions. . . . Now it's the madman who's taking the food and he's a scaredy-cat. How can I tell Uncle Chi? I'm going away today. . . ."

Little Turnip's eyes darkened. He was reproaching himself for not having fulfilled his mission. Cheng Kang was also depressed and did not speak. He was wondering who was the man sealed up in that stifling dungeon? He wished he could take this comrade's place and let him come out into the fresh air and sunshine.

A crushing sense of helplessness increased the sorrow of this parting. But Cheng Kang did not want to let the child leave

feeling sad and remorseful. Attempting to dispel the child's forebodings, Cheng Kang once more pressed Little Turnip's hands and said confidently:

"Don't worry, we'll find some way of getting in touch with him."

With tear-filled eyes, Little Turnip nodded, only half-believing.

"I mean it, Little Turnip. You're leaving, but many of us are left. Isn't that so?"

This time Little Turnip was convinced. There would still be plenty of people at Pai House. Uncle Chi, Cheng Kang — they would not forget the man in the dungeon.

"When you get to Kweichow, give my greetings to your father, and when you see Uncle Yang" — Cheng Kang hesitated — "tell him we're very much concerned about him."

Little Turnip nodded.

"When I saw Daddy off, he told me that the news in the papers must have been sent out from Pai House. . . ." Little Turnip threw a quick glance at Cheng Kang. Seeing that he had understood, the boy changed the subject. "I went upstairs that day. Uncle Yang was angry. He didn't want to go to Kweichow. He said: 'Since the papers already say I'm here, I'm not going anywhere else. If I die, I'll die in Chungking!' Daddy also said that Uncle Yang thanks the Communist Party for its concern. He also thanks Uncle Chi and the others. . . ."

Cheng Kang did not ask any more questions, only adding:

"Be sure to send our regards to Uncle Yang."

"I won't forget."

Cheng Kang wanted to say something cheerful for the boy to remember, but Little Turnip exclaimed:

"It's getting late. I must say goodbye to Uncle Chi and the others." Reluctantly he added: "I'm going. This time I'm really going."

"Goodbye, Little Turnip." Cheng Kang was still holding his hand, forcing himself to smile. "When you come back, you do another painting for us!"

"What about?"

"Paint —" Cheng Kang raised his head, "paint the dawn of our motherland!"

Cheng Kang stood by the window all morning. He had been very depressed since Little Turnip's departure, and his thoughts kept returning to the child. Now he and his mother were probably on their way. Where had the prison van taken them? To Hsifeng in Kweichow or to some other place? He doubted whether they would ever come back to Pai House.

Liu Sze-yang placed his hand on his comrade's shoulder and said gently: "Cheer up, Cheng Kang." He too was depressed. He had not seen the boy very often, yet he too had come to love him.

"The day will come when we'll settle these accounts!" said Cheng Kang, suddenly turning to Liu Sze-yang. "Not only for Little Turnip, but for all the brave comrades who have died! We must not forget the debts of blood!"

"We certainly won't."

Cheng Kang's thoughts about Little Turnip led him into deeper reflections. "It looks as if the enemy's hatching a new plot," he went on. "Didn't you say that the newspapers had published the news that General Yang Hu-cheng was imprisoned here? The enemy must have been frightened and taken them to an even more secret place."

"The enemy's dying blows."

Cheng Kang nodded agreement.

"I've been thinking," said Liu Sze-yang, getting closer, "the enemy has never given up their dirty schemes. They're even using 'truth drugs' to try and make people talk. Cheng Kang, if they'd taken me, I don't know if I could have. . . ."

"Don't think that, Liu Sze-yang. That drug is powerless against any of us," Cheng Kang said positively. "For one thing, its period of effectiveness is very short; and what is more important is that people with a strong revolutionary determination do not lose the ability to control themselves. In

fact the greater the danger from the enemy, the more vigilant they become."

"But I nearly fell into a trap." Liu Sze-yang looked at him ruefully. "I've given the matter much thought lately. The enemy takes advantage of every weakness. The question is, which weakness is it going to be? I can withstand direct ordeals, but I was afraid of being wronged by my comrades or misunderstood by the Party. The enemy grasped that I was individualistic and tried to make use of my desire to clear myself with the Party."

"The enemy was eager to obtain information from you, but only managed to get close to you. They failed to get any Party secrets out of you."

"That was because the Party warned me in time."

Cheng Kang had been too long on his feet and the fetters were hurting his swollen ankles. Picking up the irons, he went to the corner of the room and sat down.

"Liu Sze-yang, do you think there's any connection between the enemy's trying to trick information out of you and their giving me that drug?"

"Any connection?" Cheng Kang's remark brought a sudden realization to Liu Sze-yang. "Yes, I do. They're doing all they can to find the Party organization both in Chungking and in the prisons."

Cheng Kang nodded.

Liu Sze-yang continued: "That's why they asked us both the same questions."

". . . and failed exactly the same way!" Cheng Kang laughed.

"They failed, but they haven't given up. They will certainly. . . ."

"Try new tricks! That was why I was suspicious of you when you came. I was afraid that the enemy had sent a bait. It's a favourite trick of theirs."

The warder on duty walked up to their door and unlocked it. Liu Sze-yang called to Cheng Kang:

"Exercise time. What beautiful sunshine! Let's go out and look around."

The sun was already high in the sky. A gentle breeze carried the fragrance of wild flowers, as if proclaiming that spring had come here too, although it was cut off from the rest of the world. Standing at their usual place by the railings, Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang gazed beyond the white clouds towards that distant place where their yearnings centred.

The prisoners downstairs entered the yard. Liu Sze-yang caught sight of the white-haired madman taking food to the cells on the ground floor.

"Who's he?" asked Liu Sze-yang with a glance in his direction.

"His name is Hua Tse-liang. They say he's been in prison more than ten years. He's gone out of his mind."

"I've heard the name before. What kind of a person is he?"

"A non-Party member and a coward," said Cheng Kang. "He's said to come from northern Szechuan. At first he was imprisoned in Chengtu, and then he was sent to Hsifeng with Comrades Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien. Later he was transferred here. The day Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien were murdered the enemy took him along to the execution ground too to frighten him. He went insane and didn't speak for several months afterwards."

"No guts," said Liu Sze-yang with contempt. "True revolutionaries aren't frightened by death."

"It's my guess that he was just an ordinary civilian in the former Szechuan Soviet Base Area and nabbed by mistake."

"Then why didn't the enemy release him?"

"No one entering SACO grounds ever gets out again. Have you heard about the four students from the Government No. 6 Middle School? They happened to be walking past SACO headquarters one day in 1941, and were hauled in and tortured by the secret agents. They're still here." Cheng Kang made

a slight motion with his hand in the direction of several pale youths in the prison yard.

"Who's the one who waters the trees every day? You'd think he was a horticulturist."

"That's Hu Hao, one of the four students. He used to be in the Hsifeng concentration camp."

"Which one is Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan?" Liu Sze-yang asked softly. "Did he come out today?"

"Let me see. . . . Over there, that man sunning himself on the steps, that's Comrade Chi. He's been ill for a long time and has only just recovered. He's even thinner than before."

Liu Sze-yang turned his eyes in the direction Cheng Kang was pointing and looked at Chi Hsiao-hsuan. The old comrade whom he had so long respected sat weakly in the sunshine. A ragged tunic failed to cover his arms and legs which seemed mere skin and bone. The eyes sunken deep in his gaunt, bloodless face were expressionless. But for his faint breathing he seemed like a stone statue. Liu Sze-yang gazed at him and frowned. How could such a weakened constitution stand up under the endless torments? How could such a wasted body sustain him in the struggle without weakening his vigilance and determination?

"That man squatting beside Comrade Chi used to be in the New Fourth Army," continued Cheng Kang. "He was arrested with General Yeh Ting. They say he took part in the Long March. He hasn't revealed his identity to this day. We call him Lao Yuan, but nobody knows his real name. He used to be at the Shangjao concentration camp."

Liu Sze-yang looked at Lao Yuan, who was just as thin as Comrade Chi, but less feeble.

One by one Cheng Kang identified the comrades downstairs. He also pointed out which were the secret agents placed among the Communists.

A muffled noise was heard in the distance. Cheng Kang

and Liu Sze-yang listened carefully. The sound gradually became clearer, but it didn't sound quite like a motor car.

Then they saw a motor cycle and sidecar appear on the highway which wound around the mountains. It sped towards Pai House and was soon hidden from view by the high wall. The engine stopped. They guessed that it had halted by the stone bridge.

Shortly afterwards, the little door by the staircase was opened, disgorging a swarm of agents. They hurried upstairs and made for the room marked SACO No. 9 Record Room. A strip of paper stamped SACO sealed the entrance. One of the agents tore it off and pushed the door open. Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang caught a glimpse of a big safe and dusty shelves piled high with all sorts of things. There were dog-eared documents yellowed with age, files in both Chinese and English, special charts, weather reports and coloured maps. Liu Sze-yang kept his eyes on these, but Cheng Kang was more interested to see what was in the safe. The agents, however, only emptied the shelves and did not open the safe.

They rushed downstairs with big bundles of papers and came back for more, their feet clumping on the creaking floorboards. Files scattered and fell to the ground, but no one had the time to pick them up. They were trampled under heavy boots. . . . A small green gramophone record — teaching material used by the American agents — was trodden on and broken; a little further on lay several SACO textbooks in English and Chinese on operations, demolition, trailing and arrests. A metal container holding newsreel films of Chiang Kai-shek and American intelligence agents inspecting SACO was crushed underfoot. All these top secret materials were being heedlessly dropped all over the place.

"Look what those bastards have been up to." Cheng Kang pointed to a sheaf of cards strewn over the floor.

Pasted on them were the photographs of young girls of about eighteen, with their ages, and names in English and Chinese, and serial numbers.

"They are girls from respectable families. They brought them here in their jeeps."

"Who did?" asked Liu Sze-yang.

"American secret agents."

Head warder Yang Chin-hsing came with a big bunch of cabinet keys and discovered Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang standing at the head of the stairs.

"Go back to your cells!" He glared at them with bloodshot eyes, but his threatening tones held a trace of panic. Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang pretended not to hear him, and lingered there smiling while the head warder fretted and fumed. Then they sauntered back to their cell. The door was locked behind them, but they continued to watch the proceedings from the window.

Two hours passed while the secret agents, stopping occasionally to wipe the sweat from their faces with their grimy hands, continued to carry things out. Then the wind brought a smell of something burning. Tongues of flames and thick billows of smoke rose above the wall. Paper ashes swirled up in gusts, flying in all directions. The agents were destroying the secret SACO files. Evil flames were consuming all the records of the enemy's crimes.

"They're scared. They know the end is coming," said Liu Sze-yang coldly.

"The enemy is burning paper money for his own funeral."

"This probably has something to do with Little Turnip and the others leaving," Cheng Kang reflected. "The enemy must have a whole lot of dirty tricks up their sleeves."

Presently the noise died down and the usual silence settled again over Pai House. The ashes of burnt paper continued to float in through the window. The glow of the flames outside the walls died down, the smoke thinned out and vanished.

Liu Sze-yang could not sleep that night, as thoughts of the recent occurrences kept crowding into his mind. Listening to Cheng Kang's regular breathing, he envied his calm. If only

he could sleep too. But the more he tried, the more wide-awake he became.

Tap.

Right beside his ear.

Tap, tap. . . .

What was that? Liu Sze-yang quickly shook Cheng Kang. The two sat up and tried to hear where the sound came from.

Tap, tap. . . .

Someone was knocking lightly at the door between their cell and the next that was always locked. They knew that Huang Yi-sheng's bed was just on the other side. Cheng Kang rapped twice in reply and then waited. The tapping stopped, but something white rustled through the narrow crack under the door. Cheng Kang picked it up. The general had sent them a newspaper.

Liu Sze-yang remembered being told that Huang Yi-sheng was the only man in the prison allowed to have a newspaper. Between its sheets was a note.

As Cheng Kang was bending over the slip of paper, Liu Sze-yang caught his arm with a suppressed exclamation. He turned around and, by the dim light coming into their cell from a sentry post, read the newspaper headline:

"Communist Forces Cross Yangtze."

Liu Sze-yang quickly pointed to another place on the paper, whispering excitedly: "See this . . . the order Chairman Mao and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh issued to the Liberation Army!"

Before their eyes rose the figures of Chairman Mao Tsetung and Commander-in-Chief Chu Teh; Liberation Army men listening to the order, holding their weapons high and shouting like thunder; thousands of sails racing across the mighty Yangtze; red flags snapping in the wind, advancing.

A great army a million strong was sweeping south!

Lightning streaked through the sky, followed by a deafening crack of thunder. The dark prison seemed to quiver. Another dazzling flash and another roll, then huge raindrops beat down

on the roof with a metallic clatter which plucked at the prisoners' heartstrings and set them vibrating in response.

"May the earth-shaking spring thunder come quickly."

"Come soon, storm!"

21

"CELL 7! Exercise time up!"

The Bear stood flicking his whip and shouting in the middle of the enclosure.

The behaviour of the Kuomintang jailers was as changeable as the weather, which had become chilly after a few days of heavy spring rains. The Bear, who had been almost meek, was his arrogant self again.

As Yu Hsin-chiang returned to his cell, he saw the Owl, gun in hand, striding nervously through the yard at the head of a number of warders. They were escorting several youths who were evidently students.

"There are four of them."

"One is badly injured."

"Why, that one looks like a mere child!"

Amidst these comments the Owl hurried up to Cell 7 and, as if to bolster up his own courage, yelled savagely: "Lock them up in Cell 7!"

The Owl flung open the door with a loud clang and the warders pushed the newcomers in. Three of them were very young: the youngest was about fourteen, and the eldest no more than eighteen. With much effort, they held up a semi-conscious man who apparently had been severely tortured. Yu Hsin-chiang went over to lend them a hand.

"I'm sorry. You'll have to crowd up because of us," said the eldest student politely, looking round the crammed cell. The inmates greeted them warmly:

"It's too draughty there. Bring the wounded man over here."

"Come on, let's move over a bit."

They took the newcomers' few possessions and stacked them

neatly against the wall. Although the cell held many prisoners, it was tidy and the floor was scrubbed, unlike the damp, filthy jail at the Second Department where the walls crawled with bedbugs and lice. Touched by the warm welcome, the boys were at a loss for words.

"Let Comrade Kao sleep further inside," the eldest one finally said. "We youngsters will stay over here." The other two nodded agreement.

Helped by Yu Hsin-chiang, the students carried the injured man into a corner of the room. Expressions of concern came from all sides. "Let him have my blanket," said Elder Brother.

"No, Elder Brother, you're a sick man."

"Take mine," said Ting Chang-fa, "and here's my pillow."

A pallet was made up that was the most comfortable in the whole cell, and the injured man was gently laid down on it.

Yu Hsin-chiang wrung out a wet towel and wiped the blood-stains from the man's face. Then he folded the towel and placed it on his hot forehead. The man was in his middle twenties. His face was pallid, probably from loss of blood, and his black-ringed eyes lay deep in their sockets. The lines at the corners of his mouth seemed to denote a certain stubbornness peculiar to intellectuals.

"Who is he?" someone asked. "Your teacher?"

The eldest student shook his head. "No, we met him at the Second Department."

"He was conscious a while back," said another schoolboy whose head was shaven. "But the prison van was stuffy and it shook a lot, so he fainted."

The man was covered with smears of blood and his limbs bore the marks of a whip. His left leg was apparently most seriously injured. It was in a plaster cast from knee to groin.

Yu Hsin-chiang brought a basin of water and carefully washed away the blood that kept seeping from under the plaster.

"Is it broken?"

"Worse than that!" said the youngest boy, angrily. "The

secret agents tried to force information out of him by beating his leg with a rubber truncheon studded with steel needles!"

"He told us they beat it to a pulp and then rubbed alcohol on it!" said the shaven-headed student.

The eldest bit his lip with suppressed fury as he recalled:

"He told us it was an American torture. The secret agents called it 'putting on mourning.' They plastered bandages over the pulped flesh and when the blood had dried, ripped off the gauze strip by strip, together with the flesh that was stuck to it."

The inmates of the cell looked with pity at the victim of such an atrocity. Yu Hsin-chiang wrung out another towel to replace the one that was getting dry.

After a while, the prisoners were silent. The students were consulting each other in whispers. Yu Hsin-chiang kept glancing at them sympathetically. After a few minutes had passed, the eldest one walked over to Yu Hsin-chiang, as he had been the first to greet them. Yu Hsin-chiang took the boy's proffered hand with a smile. "What about making some introductions?"

The student nodded happily. "I'll introduce us," he said. "I am Ching Yi-ching — the eldest — almost nineteen years old. The others call me Lao Ching."

"No, he's called 'Little' Ching," piped up the youngest. The other prisoners around him smiled.

Ching Yi-ching paid no attention to the interruption and in serious tones continued:

"I'm a first year student in electrical engineering at Chungking University. This is Ho. . . ."

"The bald monk!" broke in the youngest again, and everyone laughed.

"He's at the Number One Municipal Middle School. His name is Ho Yi-chang, but everybody calls him 'Monk.' " Ching Yi-ching also smiled, but the student who was called Monk pouted.

"And then there's this other fellow from the Number One

Middle School. He's only just fourteen, so we call him 'Little Ning.' "

"I'm called Old Ning!"

A burst of laughter drowned the rest of his objection.

"The unconscious comrade," said Ching Yi-ching, "is Kao Pang-chin. He's a news reporter. . . ."

"You mustn't tell anyone!" put in Little Ning. "He told us in the prison van that we must be careful not to talk about our cases here."

"You haven't given anything away." Yu Hsin-chiang smiled, then introduced himself and Ting Chang-fa.

"He's bald too," remarked Little Ning, examining Ting Chang-fa. "I won't call him Ting Chang-fa.* He doesn't have any hair at all, so I'll call him 'Bald Monk.' "

"Little Ning!" Ching Yi-ching frowned reprovingly.

Ting Chang-fa was in no mood to join in their banter, so he moved away, sucking at his empty pipe. The students pressed around Yu Hsin-chiang.

"How long have you been in prison?"

"More than a year."

"What a long time."

"Then all you political prisoners are old-timers?" Ho Yi-chang said, quite awed.

"What's so 'old' about us? Many have been here eight or ten years."

"Ayah! It's only a week since we were arrested, but it feels like a life time already." Plump Little Ning stuck out his tongue childishly and scratched his head. "Ten years? What does ten years feel like?"

The political situation in the Kuomintang-held areas had gone from bad to worse after the reactionaries' refusal to sign the peace agreement, and Yu Hsin-chiang was worried for the safety of the Party Underground. "Have many people been

* Chang-fa means long hair.

arrested recently?" he asked. "Were all of you in the student movement?"

Little Ning jumped up in surprise immediately. "How did you know about us?"

"Anyone could guess," declared Ho Yi-chang.

At that instant Little Ning caught sight of a warder passing the cell door, and out of habit began chanting:

> Agents are wicked, agents are evil,
> Agents are worse than a plague to the people!

Yu Hsin-chiang glanced at him and shook his head to stop him. "Don't do that. It does no good."

Little Ning looked at him, bewilderment in his eyes.

"But we swore at the warders every day at the Second Department," said Ho Yi-chang defensively. He could not understand Yu Hsin-chiang's objection.

"Comrade Kao chanted with us too," added Ching Yi-ching. "Everyone did, and there was nothing the agents could do about it."

"That's right!" affirmed Little Ning. "Even if they put me on their black list, I'll say: 'President Chiang, Acting President Li, all that bunch are chamber-pots!' Yes, even in prison I'll shout: 'Catch a mouse in the house — drown it, drown it, drown it! A no-good government on the loose — down it, down it, down it!' "

"It's different here from the Second Department, you mustn't shout and make a fuss whenever you feel like it," said Yu Hsin-chiang. Nevertheless, he liked these frank, eager students. He decided that he would win their confidence and do his best to guide them in the struggle.

"That's true," agreed Ching Yi-ching. "We've no experience in fighting the enemy while in prison. We were arrested after April 21st, the day the People's Liberation Army crossed the Yangtze. Since then the Kuomintang has been nabbing people right and left. On that day — the 21st — they sent more than ten thousand troops with tanks and artillery to Shapingpa. They

even cut off the water and electricity, and announced over the radio that they were going to round up all Communists."

"The arrests are still going on," added Ho Yi-chang. "Our school was shut down and the principal locked up with us at the Second Department."

"More than a hundred students were held there, although there wasn't a single Communist Party member among them," said Ching Yi-ching. "I hear these mass arrests have aroused public indignation, so the other students may be let out." He added proudly: "Our cases were extremely serious, that's why they brought us here."

"Your cases extremely serious? Merciful heavens!" exclaimed a prisoner. The whole cell rocked with laughter.

The speaker continued half-jokingly: "The Kuomintang are so clever they can't catch a single Communist, so they're arresting teen-age schoolkids instead!"

The students were embarrassed but not offended. Yu Hsin-chiang changed the subject to avoid hurting their feelings.

"Did you see anyone else at the Second Department?"

"We saw a lot of people," declared Little Ning, "all students, packed into dark cells. They'd urinated all over the floor, and it stank something awful!"

"Comrade Kao was the only Communist," recollected Ching Yi-ching. "He's a reporter, so he knows a lot. Just ask him."

Then he remembered something else.

"We also heard of someone by the name of Liu Sze-yang."

"Liu Sze-yang?"

"Yes, that's the name. We didn't see him personally," Ching Yi-ching explained, "but we saw Yeh Ting's 'Prisoner's Song' on the wall. Liu Sze-yang had written it there with explanatory notes and added his signature."

"Where is he now?"

The boys shook their heads. Unable to learn anything else of Liu Sze-yang's fate since his departure from Chatzetung, Yu Hsin-chiang lapsed into a thoughtful silence.

The students went to the grating of the door and began count-

ing the guard towers and pill-boxes outside the wall. Next they speculated among themselves which of the agents was the fiercest and which the most crafty. Each had his opinion as to how the secret agents should be dealt with in the future.

Little Ning shouted: "Lock them up!"

"I second that," said Ching Yi-ching, "but when they've been in prison long enough, they should be tried by the people and dealt with according to law."

Yu Hsin-chiang was stirred by the talk of these boisterous youngsters. He reflected that during these years of momentous changes, the revolution, which was sweeping away all the human dregs that hindered progress, was also drawing the young generation like a powerful magnet, uniting them around the Party and tempering them into steel. How swiftly men's thoughts were advancing, and to what heights the political consciousness of the masses had risen!

However, the arrest of these students also gave him misgivings about the safety of the underground Party organization. He did not know that the Party had long since modified its tactics and prevented the enemy's sabotage, and that it was rallying public opinion and making use of all possible social contacts to obtain the release of the students.

Dusk fell slowly over the camp. Another long day was drawing to a close.

The students busied themselves around the still unconscious man, wiping his face and applying more wet towels. His temperature had gone down but he was still rambling. After some time he turned around and seemed to fall into a natural sleep.

He was not really asleep. His eyes were shut, but his ears were alert to all that was happening around him. He was a snake in the grass, trying to crawl into the prisoners' confidence. However, despite his elaborate disguise he was by no means easy in his mind. Carrying out his present mission among these political prisoners was tantamount to gambling with a knife at his throat — and his own life was the stake!

The night deepened, but the man with the assumed name of Kao Pang-chin remained awake. . . . Many times during the last two years he had, at the orders of the Special Adviser, trailed Communists like a bloodhound. Every encounter had been difficult and dangerous — far more than his training had led him to expect. Each of his adversaries had been so hard to tackle. Yet he was undoubtedly superior to the general run of secret agents, otherwise this task would not have been entrusted to him. However, such thoughts did not increase his confidence. One question, in particular, he had never been able to answer: why was it that, despite the carefully worked-out plans of the Americans, operation after operation had failed, each one more dismally than the last? On his first assignment, he had managed with great pains to get Fu Chih-kao to take the bait, but the instant Hsu Yun-feng appeared, he had seen through the machinations. Even Chen Sung-lin had managed to give them the slip just as they were closing in on him. He had stayed for a whole year at the Yangtze Ordnance Works, masquerading as a worker, but had achieved nothing. Then Hsu Peng-fei had ordered him to go to the Liu family residence posing as a Communist to ensnare the lone and isolated Liu Sze-yang. The Special Adviser had repeatedly and personally instructed him how to get through Liu's defences by taking advantage of his intellectual's fear of being misunderstood. That too had miscarried. If the plainclothesmen outside the house hadn't been on their toes, Liu Sze-yang might even have escaped. He shuddered again at the memory of Hsu Peng-fei's icy sneer. . . .

The fact that this time he was expected to atone for all his past blunders did nothing to alleviate his forebodings. Here he was, surrounded by Communists and facing danger at every turn. The odds were that he would ruin his career. His flesh rose at the thought. He felt that he was not the only one to lack self-confidence and that even Hsu Peng-fei and the Special Adviser were not devoid of similar feelings. How promising all those carefully-laid plans had seemed at first, and what

fiascos they had turned out to be. The only difference was that Hsu Peng-fei and the Yanks never took any responsibility for the defeats, all of which they blamed on their subordinates.

His present job was by far the most difficult one he had tackled. Not only was he to get close to the leading body of the Communist Party organization at Chatzetung; he also had to uncover its links with the Party Underground in Chungking. This new plan had been drawn up by the Americans after Hsu Peng-fei's project to smash the Underground during the peace talks had fizzled out. The aim this time was to work quietly until sufficient information had been collected, and then strike suddenly at the very core of the Communist Underground. Who would have thought that such a tough assignment would again fall to his lot?

He had received a letter recently from Li Chi-kang who was in the United States, and when he looked at the enclosed photograph of his smiling colleague dressed in a smart Western suit, he had felt a twinge of envy. As he thought of himself caught up in this whirlpool, fierce pangs of jealousy tore through him.

The next morning Kao Pang-chin gradually "recovered consciousness." He gazed for a time at the unfamiliar surroundings with the eyes of a newcomer. Suddenly, as if something had stung him, he started to struggle and groan in an effort to rise.

"Lao Kao, don't move! Lie still!"

The students eased him back but he kept trying to sit up. "I'm not going to lie here," he protested. "Let me get up!"

"You're still bleeding. You mustn't catch cold."

"I can't sleep here." He pointed to the inmates, and as if offended cried. "I'm dressed warmly, but the comrades by the door only have thin clothes."

"There's too much of a draught over there for you."

"If my comrades can sleep there, so can I." He started to crawl across the floor. Unable to restrain him, the boys helped him to his feet.

"Take the blanket along!"

"And the pillow. . . ."

"Thank you comrades, but I don't want them," Kao Pang-chin said obstinately. "I can't wallow in comfort while others sleep beside a cold doorway."

He returned every single item the prisoners had given him, though he grudgingly retained an old pillow when they insisted. He smiled his thanks and placed the pillow between Yu Hsin-chiang's pallet and those of the three students. Then shaking off the supporting hands, he slowly lay down.

After a while he opened his eyes and upbraided the boys in low tones.

"You've forgotten everything I told you, haven't you?"

The students hung their heads, like pupils unable to answer their teacher's questions.

"What are a few wounds! Is there anyone here who hasn't been tortured? Is that worth boasting about? Does that make me deserve different treatment? Think how many people have been tortured, how many have died."

"Comrade Kao!" someone interrupted. "The students meant well. Besides, injured prisoners must be given some special consideration. This is an unwritten rule with us."

"Oh . . ." he said, slightly abashed. "I thought they had been boasting. I didn't know you'd done this out of class love. . . . But I insist that you comrades must not pamper me."

Kao Pang-chin's face contorted and he pressed the plaster cast as if his leg were giving him excruciating pain. The students asked apprehensively if his wounds had become inflamed again.

"It's nothing." Affecting to be more concerned for them than for himself, he admonished them: "When you get to a new place, the first thing to do is take a cool look around. You must distinguish friend from foe and be careful of what you say."

Although he had spoken softly, Yu Hsin-chiang had overheard, and he decided to watch the newcomer more carefully.

Kao Pang-chin shut his eyes and said no more. When exercise time came around that afternoon, he politely declined the students' offers to help him outside. Left alone in the cell, he dragged himself to the grating, propped his plaster-encased leg against the wall, and gazed into the prison yard — that little world where the inmates took their daily stroll.

He watched as, cell by cell, the prisoners came out for their exercise and went back again. He ate very little for supper. Afterwards, he leaned motionless against the door, staring up at the darkening sky.

The evening roll-call over, he crawled silently to his pallet and was soon asleep.

This went on for several days, and except for a few whispered words with the students, he did not speak to anyone. Yu Hsin-chiang kept close watch on the newcomer, but made no attempt to strike up a conversation with him. He was biding his time.

One morning, Kao Pang-chin was taken out for questioning. When he came back, his demeanour seemed somewhat different.

That night Kao Pang-chin lay awake for a long time. His sighing and tossing woke up Yu Hsin-chiang who was sleeping beside him. Yu asked the restless man:

"Do you know any one here, Lao Kao?"

Kao Pang-chin did not answer at first. Perhaps he was considering whether the question had a deeper meaning. Finally, he replied ambiguously:

"Yes and no."

Yu Hsin-chiang asked no more.

After a while Kao Pang-chin volunteered:

"I'm not sure if any of my acquaintances are here, but there are people I know of, who may not know me."

"Who?"

"Do you know Hsu Yun-feng?"

"He used to be in the next cell, but he went long ago."

"I heard at the Second Department that he is imprisoned at Plum Garden, where the American advisers stay."

This was the first indication he had heard of Hsu Yun-feng's whereabouts. Yu Hsin-chiang wondered how this newcomer had secured this information, but he did not want to ask too much just now. This needed thinking over.

"Where is Cheng Kang?" whispered Kao Pang-chin.

"I've no idea."

"Not at this camp?" Kao Pang-chin heaved a deep sigh. "Then I don't know anyone here."

After a while Kao Pang-chin spoke again: "Possibly there's someone else, but even if he is here, it would be difficult to get in touch. I know about him, but he doesn't know me."

"And who's that?"

"As I'm a reporter," came the hesitant reply, "I've often visited the Yangtze Ordnance Works. I was told of a worker who was arrested last year."

"What's his name?"

"Yu Hsin-chiang."

"Oh, have you ever met him?" inquired Yu Hsin-chiang. Kao appeared not to notice the surprise in Yu Hsin-chiang's voice. In the faint light coming through the bars, Yu Hsin-chiang saw Kao indicate that he had not met him.

"We're not acquainted," said Kao Pang-chin. "But all the men had heard of his arrest. There were rumours that he was murdered the same day. Others said he was sent to a concentration camp. The workers are still agitating on his behalf."

"Have they learned about SACO and the concentration camps?" asked Yu Hsin-chiang.

"The Kuomintang kept them secret before the peace talks, but now the papers have made them common knowledge." Then, in a manner which suggested that he sympathized with those Communists arrested the year before, he said: "After he and Cheng Kang were arrested, the workers tried to rescue them, but they failed. They came to blows with the secret agents at the plant and smashed up the factory security department. After

that, secret agents frequently disappeared at night, and not even their bodies were found. The agents got so scared they didn't dare enter the factory any more."

"That's good to hear," chuckled Yu Hsin-chiang.

"Yu Hsin-chiang's mother went every day to the office of the security department, crying and cursing them. They even threatened to arrest her."

"What!" Yu Hsin-chiang flared up.

"They didn't, of course. Several hundred workers came to her assistance and beat the agents up."

The mention of his mother reminded him of the ramshackle thatched hut in which they lived. Yu Hsin-chiang wanted to hear what had happened to his mother, so he thrust these memories out of his mind.

"Didn't the secret agents take their revenge on her later?"

"Huh! Take revenge? What with all those workers behind her? Everyone was concerned for Yu Hsin-chiang, as well as for Cheng Kang and old Master Yang. . . ."

"Old Master Yang?"

"That's Comrade Hsu Yun-feng. Didn't you know? He used that name when he was working at the plant. No one there has forgotten him, even though it's many years since he left. When they learned of his arrest many old workers wept. Some of them made a collection and insisted on visiting him. They made the rounds of all the prisons in Chungking but couldn't find him. Later, when the location of the concentration camps leaked out, many of the men wanted to break into the prison and get him out."

"Didn't the factory guards find out?"

"Yes, but they weren't the only ones who wanted to go to the rescue. Comrade Hsu Yun-feng had also been in the mines, so when the news reached the miners, they sent their people to get in touch with the arms workers. They even took some guns back to the mines."

"You don't say!"

"The whole plant was in chaos, but the enemy couldn't do a thing about it. Coal barges come and go from the factory all day, and there are so many mines around Chungking."

Kao Pang-chin told him all this with great animation and even laughed softly.

Yu Hsin-chiang was elated. So the struggle in the factory had not been affected by their arrest. On the contrary, the comrades had continued it so cleverly that the enemy had not even a shadow to clutch at! But a sudden thought sobered him.

"How do you know all this?" he asked abruptly.

"I'm a journalist and I have many friends among the workers."

"How is Yu Hsin-chiang's mother getting along these days?" Yu added in low tones: "She's my mother."

"Are you Yu Hsin-chiang?"

"Yes."

"Ah, what a coincidence!" Kao Pang-chin gripped Yu Hsin-chiang's hand. "I never expected to meet you here. I thought I heard people call you by your surname when I was half-conscious, but I never imagined that you were Yu Hsin-chiang."

The two of them continued their murmured conversation as all the others slept soundly. Kao Pang-chin's guarded manner had given place to enthusiasm. One might have thought that in Yu Hsin-chiang he had found a long-lost brother. He said that the chief reason for his arrest was that he had divulged the existence of the secret SACO prisons. His article had been omitted from the proofs of his paper in case the enemy staged a sudden inspection; and when the Information Department had censored the copy and the paper was going to press, a few items had been extracted at the last moment and his article put in instead. . . . The enemy had also wanted him because his was the only paper in the city to carry the text of the Workers' Proclamation to All Citizens of Chungking, which he had got from one of the factories. He had been tortured several times, for covering the escape of a woman reporter named Chen Ching and refusing to write her a letter luring her into a trap.

He was also tortured because of his refusal to disclose sources of information.

Kao Pang-chin paused a moment. He felt that the time was ripe for further action. Moving closer to Yu Hsin-chiang he whispered:

"I want to find the leader of the prison Party organization. It must be the leader. Can you help me?"

It seemed clumsy and hazardous to make such a request, but this course had been decided upon after exhaustive discussion. The Special Adviser had said that their adversaries were too vigilant for the indirect approach and the other old methods to achieve anything, so he had decided to try new tactics. He had instructed Kao Pang-chin to play on Yu Hsin-chiang's love for his mother, and then, when Yu Hsin-chiang was completely unprepared, make a sudden, audacious thrust. Correctly handled, he had declared, this would guarantee swift success.

Kao Pang-chin's demand indeed came as a surprise to Yu Hsin-chiang, but he forced himself to ask calmly:

"Do you think this is necessary?"

"I have top secret information which I must report to the Party before the enemy acts. Otherwise the Chungking Underground is in the most serious danger of being wrecked within the next few days! But I must give it to the leader directly, so that the information gets sent out promptly. I can't give it to anyone else."

Yu Hsin-chiang hesitated. Kao Pang-chin's tone of voice implied that the information was even more vital and urgent than his words indicated. The prison Party organization had, upon Hsu Yun-feng's suggestion, long since made a strict regulation that no one was to disclose the Party organization. Yu Hsin-chiang had been told to get acquainted with the newcomers, and in particular to find out all he could about Kao Pang-chin. But Kao was not to be told the name of any Party members, except his own.

Yu Hsin-chiang made his decision, and calmly replied: "I'm in charge."

"Splendid!" Kao Pang-chin moved closer to Yu Hsin-chiang and whispered; "I'll report to you at once. . . ."

The golden rays of the morning sun shone into the cells through the barbed wire on the prison wall. Kao Pang-chin leaned against the grating, watching the arrival of a new day.

"Quick, get up! The sun's scorching the seat of your pants!" piped up Little Ning.

Ho Yi-chang was still snoring. Little Ning rolled over, and with his lips close to his neighbour's ear, began singing to the tune of the school reveille: "Rise and shine, lazy-bones. . . ."

"Hush!" Ching Yi-ching put a warning finger to his lips. "The others are studying. Don't make such a row!"

Ho Yi-chang turned over and went back to sleep. Ching Yi-ching beckoned to Little Ning. They went to the door and gazed at the green hills outside the wall. Soon, Little Ning was looking for something else to do. He went over and nudged Ho Yi-chang with his foot. "Get up, Monk!"

Rubbing his eyes sleepily, Ho Yi-chang sat up. Seeing Little Ning smiling, he grabbed hold of him and pressed him down on the pallet, and, as Little Ning had done, began singing to the tune of the reveille: "Look, look, lazy-bones. . . ."

Both of them laughed until their tears ran, even Ching Yi-ching had to smile.

"Behave yourselves," drawled Ting Chang-fa, taking the pipe from between his lips. He glanced briefly at Yu Hsin-chiang and gave him a barely perceptible nod. Yu Hsin-chiang took the hint. Going over to Kao Pang-chin he said significantly:

"If this goes on, something will happen. Too much excitement and noise is bad, very bad!"

"You're right," nodded Kao Pang-chin. "It won't do any good to irritate the enemy by being rowdy."

Yu Hsin-chiang looked at him, but said no more.

"I understand," said Kao Pang-chin. "I'll persuade them to keep quiet."

Yu Hsin-chiang let it go at that. By his sudden move to find

the leading figure in the Party organization, Kao Pang-chin had shown that he was not to be trusted. What worried Yu Hsin-chiang was that Kao Pang-chin still had the students under his influence. The Party had entrusted Yu Hsin-chiang with the task of giving the boys patient and principled guidance. He was to help them take the correct path of struggle, lead their enthusiasm into the proper channels and teach them to distinguish friend from foe. At the first opportunity he must have a good talk with Ching Yi-ching, the eldest of the three and a member of the underground Youth Association.

The warders began blowing their whistles for exercise. Yu Hsin-chiang was still wrapped in thought when the cell door was opened and the others began to file out.

"Lao Kao! Didn't you say you'd come out?" cried the students.

"All right," Kao Pang-chin replied, "I'll go out for a walk. That'll stimulate my circulation and help my wounds to heal." Kao Pang-chin had been looking much better the last two days. He reached for a bamboo cane which Little Ning had picked up the day before, and started to get up. Ching Yi-ching and Ho Yi-chang hurried to assist him.

"We'll help you."

With a smile, Kao Pang-chin placed his arms over their shoulders and walked out of the door, Little Ning following with the cane. Walking abreast, they eased their way down the stairs. The Owl and the Bear stood at the other side of the yard, glaring at the four who were making themselves so conspicuous. The other prisoners were worried when they noticed this, but no one said anything.

Kao Pang-chin pointed at the prisoners in the cells downstairs. "They've been here several years at least."

"How do you know?" Little Ning inquired.

"Just look at their backs and their eyes. . . ."

"What about their backs?" asked Little Ning impatiently. "I can't see anything wrong with them!"

"They're bent from sitting year in and year out. And just look how weak their eyes have got."

"Oh, I wouldn't have noticed if you hadn't pointed it out."

"See that cell . . ." continued Kao Pang-chin.

The students did as he told them, then turned to him for explanation.

"Do you remember Yeh Ting's 'Prisoner's Song'? The one Liu Sze-yang wrote on the wall?" Kao Pang-chin went on. "That's cell number two, where General Yeh Ting was imprisoned and where he wrote those stirring lines so full of revolutionary heroism."

The boys gazed at the cell with reverent awe, and then looked at Kao Pang-chin very respectfully.

When they reached the corner of the building, Kao Pang-chin carefully put out his injured leg to step on the moist ground, then put the other one. The boys began happily trampling in the mud with their bare toes. Words were unnecessary: they now understood the sense of happiness and freedom which fills an old prisoner when he comes in contact with the soft earth.

The Owl and the Bear stood in the yard for a while longer, and then walked off.

"Here we are," said Ho Yi-chang. "This is the pool."

An expanse of clear water lay before them. The pool had again been enlarged, and water gurgled into it from a bamboo pipeline which had been laid through the electrified fences from a spring in the mountains. The boys squatted down to wash their faces and then their clothes.

It was quiet and sunny in this corner. Kao Pang-chin sat on one side, gazing around. Despite the healthy flush on his face, he was panic-stricken. The Special Adviser's tactics had proved worse than useless. Yu Hsin-chiang's suspicions had been aroused at their very first encounter. Kao Pang-chin felt utterly defeated. Every one of his increasingly difficult assignments made him seem more and more like a bungling fool. But was he to blame? He felt as frightened as if he were alone in a tiger's den.

Water swirled with pearly bubbles into the pool, throwing up a cool, fine spray. The students laughed with delight.

"I think I'll wash my hair," said Ho Yi-chang, trying to push Little Ning aside. But Little Ning resisted; he was tasting the sweet spring water and wanted to drink more.

"Stop it! Little Ning," interfered Ching Yi-ching. "You'll get sick if you drink unboiled water."

"Don't worry, I won't get sick." Little Ning held his lips close to the pipe. Suddenly Ho Yi-chang gave him a shove and caused the water to run down his collar. Laughing uproariously, the two began to splash water at each other.

"Little Ning!" scolded Ching Yi-ching. "You'll get your clothes all wet!"

"All right, that's enough." interposed Kao Pang-chin. "Do you know the story of this pool?" In his desperation he had decided to make use of these inexperienced boys to provoke a clash between the prisoners and their warders, hoping that the ensuing struggle would give him some clue to the prison Party organization. It was risky, but what else could he do? He was a mere arrow to someone else's bowstring, and now that the arrow was poised, it must be released. He knew, too, that he could not let things drag on much longer, otherwise even the students would slip out of his grasp.

The boys were waiting for him to tell them about the pool.

"A year ago," began Kao Pang-chin, pointing around as if he knew everything about the place, "this was just a bare patch of ground. This pool is the result of bitter struggles against the Gorilla and the Owl by several hundred comrades. It was wrested from the enemy after a hunger strike and at the cost of bloodshed."

The students gazed at the pool with a new expression in their eyes. Something else came into Little Ning's mind. "You said you'd try to find the Party as soon as we'd got here. Did you succeed?"

The boys looked expectantly at Kao Pang-chin. He hesitated a long time before answering.

"Can you keep this an absolute secret?"

"Yes, we can!" The boys vowed.

"Then I'll tell you." Kao Pang-chin sounded excited: "I've found it!"

Understanding flooded Little Ning's face. "Oh, no wonder you know everything." He clapped his hands with glee.

"Let's celebrate!" Exuberantly, Ho Yi-chang swung his basin, flinging water all over the ground and on to the prison wall.

Rifle bolts rattled and several vicious-looking guards peered over the wall.

"What cheek! Aren't we even allowed to splash around?" cried Kao Pang-chin angrily. "Give me that basin!"

His words added fuel to the flames. The students filled their basins and vigorously doused the walls, as if they were hurling not water but hatred.

"Stop that!"

Raucous bellows came from the top of the wall and machine-gun barrels shifted between the barbed-wire strands. The three boys stood there, unflinching.

"Shall we chant?" asked Little Ning.

"Shout as loud as you can," Kao Pang-chin urged them. "All the prisoners will support you."

"Won't this be against. . . ." Ching Yi-ching stopped in mid-sentence.

Kao Pang-chin's eyes flashed with anger. "Only cowards are afraid to struggle against enemy persecution!"

Stung to the quick, the boys held a hasty consultation on the words they would use, then Little Ning shouted: "One, two, three!" The three of them chorused:

Agent, agent, you're not so bright,
Splashing water is our right,
You think guns can give us a fright,
But we were born with the guts to fight!

Agent, agent, you're out of luck,
Soon your boss will be dead as a duck,
Then you will be really stuck! . . .

The shouting made Sister Chiang drop her work. She went to the door to see what it was all about.

"Who's shouting?" she asked.

"Some students who came a few days ago," replied Sun Ming-hsia.

"Listen," said Li Ching-chu. "It sounds as if they were chanting rhymes."

The shouts became louder and louder. They clearly heard:

> Agent, agent, you're a dirty heel,
> You run around at your master's will.
> If he says so you must kill,
> If he says "eat shit" eat you will.

Sister Chiang was surprised. "Why are they acting like that? Did you hear what they were saying? That's wrong, altogether wrong."

"Those boys are all young and inexperienced," said Sun Ming-hsia. "However, Ching Yi-ching should know better. He used to be at the middle school attached to Chungking University. His behaviour was always exemplary. I got him into the Youth Association."

"We can't blame the students. They were put up to it." Sister Chiang then asked who had taken them to the pool.

"That newcomer with the injured leg."

"The Party has decided not to start struggles without good reason," someone said heatedly. "We cannot support such actions."

"You're right," agreed Sister Chiang. She told Sun Ming-hsia: "Pass the word immediately to all the cells."

Running footsteps sounded in the prison yard. Yu Hsin-chiang and Ting Chang-fa hurried over to the pool, followed by several others from Cell 7.

Just then, the Owl and the Bear appeared in the enclosure with a pack of warders. A triumphant sneer was on the Owl's face. Here at last was his opportunity to vent his spleen on the political prisoners. As soon as the students came around the corner, he yelled:

"Guards! Put 5782, 5784 and 5785 in heavy irons." Glaring at the students, he snarled: "So you think you can break the regulations, do you? Don't know this is a prison? Any more trouble from anyone, and exercise will be cancelled for all prisoners today!"

The agents dragged in three sets of fetters and fixed them on the boys' ankles. Little Ning and Ho Yi-chang made a few tentative steps, then shuffled towards their cell as if they didn't care a straw. After a moment's hesitation Ching Yi-ching followed them.

Red in the face, Kao Pang-chin started to protest, but Yu Hsin-chiang covered his mouth with his hand. Another prisoner took Kao Pang-chin by the arm and together they hustled him away.

The warders, who had come to take their revenge upon the prisoners, now stood around not knowing what to do. Frustrated, the Bear stamped up to Cell 7 and locked the door with a loud clang.

"Strange," murmured Sun Ming-hsia returning to her pallet. She whispered to Sister Chiang: "Just what's this all about?"

"What do you think?"

"Sister Chiang! Something has just occurred to me. Didn't Kao Pang-chin say that Lao Hsu is now imprisoned at Plum Garden?"

"Yes, he did," replied Sister Chiang. "Do you think there's anything wrong in that?"

"Lao Hsu may or may not be there," said Sun Ming-hsia, "but when the secret agents came to get him, they were so secretive about it, that none of us were able to find out where he was being taken. How could Kao Pang-chin have heard such top secret information at the Second Department?"

Sister Chiang nodded in agreement, and Sun Ming-hsia continued: "I've studied medicine, and I know that plaster casts are applied for broken bones, but not for such injuries as he claims to have received. I strongly suspect that he is an enemy, and a most dangerous one at that. Do you think that's possible?"

"Yes, I think it is." Sister Chiang had already been informed by Elder Brother about the newcomer's suspicious behaviour the night before. "We've learned that he has already approached Yu Hsin-chiang. The Party is keeping him under observation, because his words and actions have been highly suspicious. Why did he try to start a struggle against the enemy without getting permission from the organization? And why was he in such a hurry? He didn't even take the trouble to inform the Party beforehand. That's not the way a Communist behaves. We must investigate him thoroughly."

"Shall I inform Cell 7?"

Sister Chiang shook her head. "They're already doing that. Didn't you see Yu Hsin-chiang and the others pull him away just now?"

There was a rapid drumming on the bamboo clappers. Footsteps clattered through the yard as warders came for a prisoner.

A little later, a prisoner standing by the grating informed them that the agents had taken Kao Pang-chin away.

"Where to?" Sun Ming-hsia wondered aloud.

Sister Chiang was silent for a moment. This new development did not surprise her. She did not believe that Kao Pang-chin would be removed from the camp. It was more likely that under the pretext of being questioned, he had gone to receive new instructions. Sister Chiang, however, did not express her thoughts aloud. She merely replied:

"You don't have to worry about him. He'll be back."

That evening two warders entered the yard, supporting Kao Pang-chin who was dragging his legs as if with great difficulty.

The inmates of Cell 7 happened to be outside taking their exercise. The students were overjoyed at the sight of Kao Pang-chin, and forgetting the heavy fetters around their ankles, they hurried forward, calling:

"Lao Kao! Lao Kao! You're back!"

Kao Pang-chin affected to be moved at seeing them. Smiling

affectionately at Little Ning, he took his arms from the warders' shoulders and held them out to the boys.

"Our common struggle unites us closely," he said with much feeling. "We can never be separated. . . . See, we're together again."

Little Ning raised his fist, shouting: "Nothing can frighten us!"

"Let's take Lao Kao back to our cell to rest," suggested Ching Yi-ching.

Ting Chang-fa walked over and smiled at Kao Pang-chin. "It's hard for the kids to walk with their heavy chains. Let me help you."

Others also volunteered to assist him.

Kao Pang-chin nodded his thanks. "Stay a little while longer in the yard," he said to the students. "Today's tortures were light, very light!"

Ting Chang-fa and another prisoner helped him back to their cell.

The Bear was standing at the door of Cell 7, talking to someone. Hearing footsteps behind him, he turned around and with his usual ferocity glared at the trio. Then he flicked his whip and strode quickly down the stairs. Kao Pang-chin had caught his last words: "No. The cell doors will remain locked after exercise time."

Ting Chang-fa helped Kao Pang-chin to his pallet, then went out again to enjoy the last few minutes of fresh air before exercise was over.

There was no one in the cell except Yu Hsin-chiang who was scrubbing the floor. Kao Pang-chin noticed that even the ailing Elder Brother had gone out. So Yu Hsin-chiang had stayed in during exercise time, the Bear had been talking to him. Yu Hsin-chiang now looked somewhat ill-at-ease as he rolled down his sleeves and removed the jacket which had been draped over his shoulders. Instead of placing it on his own pallet, he tossed it into the far corner of the cell. Picking up a

wooden tub, he nodded at Kao Pang-chin and greeted him with forced heartiness:

"So you're back, Lao Kao!"

"It's terrible!" muttered Kao Pang-chin, trying to arouse Yu Hsin-chiang's sympathy and attention. "While the agents were questioning me, they mentioned that Chen Ching had been arrested."

"I'm going for water. We'll talk this evening." Yu Hsin-chiang went to the door, then added hastily: "I'll be back right away."

Kao Pang-chin was left alone in the cell. He crept over to the grating and saw that Yu Hsin-chiang was walking away. Then with an agile bound he was in the corner where Yu Hsin-chiang had thrown his jacket. He picked up the garment and examined it. In the seam of the sleeve he found a slip of paper. Extracting it carefully, he read:

"Message received. Have paid bearer one hundred silver dollars as instructed."

Kao Pang-chin glanced at the slip once more, then returned it to its original place. Putting down the jacket as he had found it, he sprang back to his pallet. No sooner had he lain down, than hurried footsteps sounded in the corridor. Yu Hsin-chiang entered the cell with a tub full of water. He looked around, and retrieved his jacket and draped it over his shoulders again. Then he dipped a rag in the tub, wrung it out and applied himself once more to the scrubbing, as if attempting by these actions to hide his annoyance at his own carelessness.

Warders began yelling that exercise time was over.

"Why so soon?" Kao Pang-chin asked his returning cell mates. "The Bear must be up to something again!"

"He can't scare me!" shouted Little Ning, then added: "How fierce the Bear looks today."

"Let me see!" Kao Pang-chin raised his arms for the students to help him across to the door, then stood there looking into the slowly gathering dusk.

"The Gorilla has come into the yard!" called Little Ning.

"Be careful," someone warned him. "When that fellow shows up it means trouble!"

"Where is he?" Kao Pang-chin raised his hands to the bars and pulled himself up.

"Over there," pointed Ho Yi-chang. "He's looking at us."

"Oh, I see him now. He looks nastier than ever." Kao Pang-chin took his hands from the bars. He knew that the Gorilla had received his signal.

A few moments later, the Owl clattered up the stairs with several warders.

"Number 5783! Come on out!"

The warders pushed into Cell 7 and dragged Kao Pang-chin away.

Half an hour later, Kao Pang-chin returned. Irons had been fastened around his ankles. The boys washed the fresh blood stains from his forehead.

"You look pale. How's your leg?"

"Was it the Gorilla who beat you?"

"It's nothing," Kao Pang-chin smiled weakly and shook his fetters as if they were of no consequence. "They're taking it out of us for that splashing, but this is the worst they can do." Then he sighed: "Still we'd better not fool around any more. It's bad, and most unnecessary."

Yu Hsin-chiang smiled and nodded approval, while the students lowered their heads, subdued. The incident that morning still hung like a cloud over them.

Desperate screams outside the prison wall suddenly rent the silence.

"I . . . didn't send any letter, I didn't. . . . It's all a mistake! . . . I have loyally served the Kuomintang and the country for ten years. . . . I tell you . . . it's a mistake. . . . I never got one hundred silver dollars. . . ."

A searchlight pierced the darkness, its white beam falling on the Bear. Secret agents were manhandling the cringing wretch.

Kao Pang-chin started in dismay. What a bungler the Gorilla was! Couldn't he have thought of a better way to handle this?

The Bear's shouts were sure to give the whole show away! Kao Pang-chin glanced covertly at his cell mates. Luckily their expressions were unchanged.

The prisoners returned to their pallets and quietly lay down to sleep.

Night deepened. The drumming on the bamboo clappers had started long ago. Kao Pang-chin lay with his eyes shut. The students were fast asleep, and Yu Hsin-chiang hadn't come to talk with him about Chen Ching's arrest. The more he thought of it, the less he liked the looks of things. An intense fear crept over him. The shrieks of the arrested Bear were certain to arouse suspicion. He was in danger of being exposed at any moment. Suddenly, Kao Pang-chin realized that he had miscalculated. Perhaps Yu Hsin-chiang's note had been planted there to draw him into a trap. Why hadn't he thought more carefully before he acted? His game was up now. There was no doubt that he had given himself away. If he stayed here any longer, there was no telling what might happen. His head throbbed. Baleful eyes seemed to glare at him in the surrounding darkness; then Hsu Peng-fei's swarthy, sneering face rose before him. Everything else was forgotten now — all but the desire to live, to escape. With staring, terror-stricken eyes, he started to get up, intending to make a dash for the door, but Yu Hsin-chiang was watching him. Other prisoners were silently sitting up. . . .

"Get up, Kao Pang-chin," ordered Yu Hsin-chiang in a stern voice. "Tell us who you are."

Kao Pang-chin fought down his mounting panic. Calmly, but with a note of strong indignation, he replied:

"Me? I'm journalist Kao Pang-chin."

"Pah!"

"What do you mean by that, comrade?"

"Who are you calling 'comrade'?" someone retorted angrily. "Tell us, who are you?"

"I protest! Even though I didn't stop the students when they

were fooling around, you shouldn't behave like this to a fellow-Communist. . . ."

"Shut up! Get over there!" Yu Hsin-chiang pointed to the far end of the cell.

"Is that the way to treat a wounded comrade?" Kao protested.

"Get over there!"

In the faint glow from a light-bulb outside, Kao Pang-chin noticed that the expressions on the prisoners' faces had changed. Yu Hsin-chiang's cold fury and the glares of the others made him tremble. He inched in the direction Yu Hsin-chiang had indicated. He saw several shadows moving towards the door. Once the exit was blocked, he would be at the mercy of these people, and he would be done for! He whirled round and rushed for the door, intending to shout for help, but a pair of vice-like hands reached out of the darkness, lifted him from his feet and clamped around his windpipe.

"I'm warning you — you'd better behave yourself," said Ting Chang-fa, pushing Kao Pang-chin into a dark corner and placing a heavy knee on his chest.

"W-what's going on?" asked the students who were now awake. In order to ensure that Kao Pang-chin would get no warning of what was about to happen, they had not been told anything beforehand.

The boys were mystified.

"Is he a bad man?" asked Little Ning. "Isn't he a Communist?"

"You'll soon find out," Yu Hsin-chiang told them.

"Watch that door!" said Ting Chang-fa to the men who were guarding it. Extracting his ever-present pipe from between his teeth, he said: "Let's all sit down and talk this over quietly."

"I . . . I . . ." mumbled Kao Pang-chin, quivering with fear.

"Who are you?" Yu Hsin-chiang asked again.

"I — I'm afraid . . ." gasped Kao Pang-chin, his face as white as a sheet.

"What of?" Ting Chang-fa laughed.

"Who are you?"

Fingers like prongs of steel dug into his throat.

Painfully, reluctantly, he croaked: "Cheng Ke-chang!"

Yu Hsin-chiang had heard Lao Hsu mention this name. He continued:

"Where is the Chen Ching you mentioned?"

"I — I don't know. . . ."

"Isn't he Kao Pang-chin?" Little Ning asked in surprise.

"A secret agent!" grated Ho Yi-chang between his teeth. "He tricked us! He must have been the one who gave it away that Ching Yi-ching was a member of the underground Youth Association."

Ching Yi-ching said: "He deliberately egged us on to shout rhymes to wreck the Party leadership!"

"He'll never fool me again," declared Little Ning, clenching his fists so hard the knuckles cracked.

Cheng Ke-chang was regaining his breath and listening to what the students were saying. As the fingers around his neck tightened once more, he confessed:

"At . . . at first . . . the Chief . . . at the press conference . . . Chen Ching escaped. . . ."

"Tell us," asked Ting Chang-fa, "Why did you pick Cell 7, and not any other?"

"That — that's. . . ." Chen Ke-chang shook uncontrollably. At that moment, the footsteps of a patrolling warder sounded in the corridor. Cheng Ke-chang began to thrash about desperately, hoping that the scuffling on the floorboards would bring the guard to his rescue.

"Stop it!" Yu Hsin-chiang ordered in a low voice. "If the warder hears anything, we'll strangle you at once!"

Cheng Ke-chang instantly stopped, and lay still rolling his eyes helplessly.

"Talk!"

"The Chief placed Liu Sze-yang under house arrest during the peace talks. . . . Then he sent me to masquerade . . . as a Communist."

"Were you the one who arrested Liu Sze-yang?" Ho Yi-chang flung himself forward and grabbed Cheng Ke-chang by the neck.

"Kill him!" said Little Ning.

"Not so fast!" Ching Yi-ching intervened. "He's being questioned now."

Yu Hsin-chiang resumed the interrogation. "What's your mission? Out with it!"

Little Ning seized Cheng Ke-chang by the hair and sunk his fingers into the agent's face. "Talk, or I'll scratch your eyes out!"

Cheng Ke-chang dared not move. The boy was capable of carrying out his threat.

"I — I'll talk . . ." he mumbled. "I was ordered to find out about the Party organization here . . . and your contacts . . . with the Chungking Underground. . . ."

"Who sent you?" Ting Chang-fa asked.

"Let's hear the whole story!" Yu Hsin-chiang added. Again fingers contracted around the agent's gullet.

"I — I'll talk. The Special Adviser. . . ."

Hopeless, Cheng Ke-chang revealed the truth, which he dared not keep back for his life's sake.

22

THE knob was carefully tuned to the required wave-length. Jumbled noises from the loudspeaker gradually changed into identifiable sounds. From far away, yet so near, thundered the voices of millions of advancing troops sweeping forward with irresistible strength.

> Our army sweeps southward,
> The enemy trembles
> Before the people's might!
> We have the wise leadership of Chairman Mao;
> Brother units support us in battle. . . .

Trembling fingers turned down the volume until the song was barely audible. Colonel Lu Ching, the prison warden, wanted to hear the Communists' war communiqués, but he was afraid that someone might hear, and hoped that the singing would be over soon. He was tired of listening to the Central News Agency.

Lu Ching was often at home these days. His routine duties at Pai House did not require his personal attention, and could be carried out just as well by Head-warder Yang Chin-hsing. When he was in low spirits Warden Lu Ching could not even be bothered to give orders over the telephone. He did not feel like playing mahjong just now. He was sitting by himself and letting his young and pretty wife entertain the guests while he waited to learn about the military situation from the enemy's broadcasts. Just to be careful, he had *The Master Spy of China*, a thick book in English, open on his knees. Thus he could pretend to be absorbed in the exploits of the "Master Spy" Tai Li while enjoying music from the radio if anyone came in.

The news bulletin brought him no comfort. "No sooner,"

he thought, "have we lost Sian and Wuhan, dammit, than even Hunan is going."

After the Hsinhua broadcast, Lu Ching turned the tuning knob and found another station where an affected female announcer was speaking. It was the "Voice of America," broadcasting in Chinese from the other side of the world. Lu Ching leaned back in the comfortable armchair, a half-smoked cigarette between his yellowed fingers. His craving for nicotine had become stronger lately, and he was chain-smoking in a room already blue with smoke. It usually reassured and comforted him to hear the comments his American allies made about China after listening to the disturbing dispatches from the Hsinhua News Agency. What good friends the Americans were. Their pep-talks were even better than those by his own people.

The cigarette had burned almost down to his knuckles, but Lu Ching did not notice it. The woman announcer's voice had suddenly become distasteful to him. She was relating the latest news.

> . . . The Communist forces have taken Shanghai. As the world's fourth largest city fell to the attackers, bullets rained on the U.S. Consulate-General, forcing the staff to lie on the floor. The Stars and Stripes flew at half-mast over the seven-storey building. The consul-general said that this was to mourn the late Defence Secretary Forrestal. Since entering this eastern metropolis with its population of six million, the Communist forces. . . .

Lu Ching hadn't expected that the Americans would sound so spineless. He switched off the radio in disappointment and lit another cigarette.

Lu Ching had rejoiced some time ago, when the Communists had shelled and damaged the British warship "Amethyst" on the Yangtze, because they had at last angered the foreigners. But now the Americans, too, were looking on as helplessly as the British — and flat on their stomachs in their own consulate at that — while the Communist forces drove southward.

If only the Americans would make up their minds to take part in the fighting on a large scale everything would be fine,

for then the third world war would begin. But as it was they were hastily withdrawing their naval base at Tsingtao. The prospects certainly looked grim. Now that the Communists had crossed the Yangtze, who could tell how bad things might get?

Thank heavens the attitude of the Special Adviser at Plum Garden was different from that of the U.S. armed forces, and from Ambassador Leighton Stuart. Of course, one had to consider that the actions of the U.S. forces were in the public eye, and Stuart had to keep up the appearance of a diplomatic envoy. But why hadn't Stuart returned to Washington? Why was he still hanging around in Nanking, now that the Communist forces had already occupied the embassy grounds? Lu Ching was convinced that the Special Adviser was the decisive figure, the real representative of Washington's true intentions. It was a pity that the Special Adviser's plans had repeatedly misfired. Even sending Cheng Ke-chang to Chatzetung had fallen flat despite the care that had been put into the scheme. Worse than that, Cheng Ke-chang had divulged all the Special Adviser's secrets, and a furious Hsu Peng-fei had had him shot — this pet of Yen Tsui's on whom Yen had spent so many years training.

Lu Ching threw away his cigarette and lit another one, then sank back in the armchair, deep in thought. He was certain that the set-up was more complicated at Pai House than at Chatzetung, but he couldn't find the smallest clue. Some time ago they had caught the cook who was trying to smuggle some wild onions into the dungeon. They had tortured him to death, but learned nothing. Yet surely there were Communist activities at Pai House. Lu Ching thought of the few political prisoners who had survived from the days when he had been warden of the Hsifeng concentration camp. They had worn fetters and done hard labour rather than promise not to escape. That man Chi Hsiao-hsuan had even declared: "You are at liberty to release me or to kill me, but it is my right to reject your terms."

All his years of experience as a warden had convinced Lu Ching that these political prisoners were carrying on some sort

of activity. Yet up to the present, although the Advisory Department had exhaustively studied all the possibilities and made a special point of grilling Cheng Kang, they hadn't even found out how the information about General Yang Hu-cheng's imprisonment at Pai House had leaked out. This matter had gone up all the way to Chiang Kai-shek, and Hsu Peng-fei had been reprimanded. It had been on Chiang Kai-shek's personal orders that General Yang and other political prisoners were later secretly transferred to a prison in Kweichow.

It was exasperating. There seemed to be no solution to this riddle. During the peace talks, the postal inspection team had found a list of all the political prisoners at SACO in the mail to Hongkong. The Communist Underground had clearly intended to expose the fraud of the pretended release of political prisoners by publishing the list. It had, beyond a shadow of doubt, been sent from the concentration camps. But how?

His wife softly opened the door and came in.

"Sitting here alone? Just look at the smoke! Come out and play mahjong!"

Lu Ching shook his head.

"I don't feel like it." After a while he added: "You'd better go back to look after the guests." He ignored his wife's invitation, wanting to be left alone.

A crumpled sheet of paper in the waste-paper basket drew his attention. The word "application" brushed on it in formal writing launched him on a new train of thought. Several days earlier he had visited his wife's brother-in-law, Vice-director Shen Yang-chai of the Southwest Special District, to try and find out how things stood. He got nothing out of him. He had only seen a disorderly pile of papers on Shen's desk — all applications for transfers to Hongkong or Taiwan. He had also noticed a corner of a document, in which were written such disquieting terms as "remain under cover on the mainland" and "guerilla warfare." Lu Ching knew that many people at SACO headquarters had sent in requests for long-term leave. The fools must have forgotten MIB discipline and Tai Li's warning that

"only dead men leave the MIB." It would serve them right if they were killed.

But, if sufficient reason was given, a request for a transfer might not, after all, mark him as a "vacillating element." Perhaps Vice-director Shen Yang-chai had been giving him a hint by letting him see those applications.

His earlier request for a transfer to Taiwan had not been granted, probably because Shen Yang-chai had failed to put in a word for him. He must submit another one, or else directly ask the Bureau of Confidential Information to select him for further training in the U.S.A. The best thing would be to write to Mr. Miles. But that might be overdoing it, and how could he know whether the Yank would help him out?

He had to be prepared for the worst. He might be left on the mainland while the others went to Taiwan: the thought filled him with fear and despair. He could not let himself be sent to his death just like that! He had never had any liking for the Communists, and his hands were stained with their blood; but he had the normal instinct of self-preservation. The best thing would be to find out the details of the Communists' policy towards Kuomintang secret agents. As the old saying went: The cunning rabbit has burrows. It was always useful to have an extra line of retreat.

He thought of a man who had been on close terms with the Communists while at Hsifeng. It would be easier to talk to him than directly to a Communist.

No! Under no circumstances could he act so rashly! He must consider this carefully. . . . If only the top brass granted his request to go to Taiwan, all his worries would be over. He could even order the mass executions of the political prisoners without turning a hair.

The fear of being left on the mainland kept gnawing at him. Once the idea of leaving another door open had entered his mind, it clung tenaciously, resisting all efforts to banish it.

Lu Ching slipped out of the house. As he passed the drawing room, he heard the lively clicking of mahjong tiles. He did

not want to disturb his wife and guests, so he quietly drove off on his motorcycle and sidecar in the direction of Pai House.

Some ten minutes later, he walked into his office. It smelt musty, and everything was covered with a thick layer of dust. As he was brushing some of the dirt off, his eyes fell on the fateful date on the desk calendar: April 21 — the day the People's Liberation Army had crossed the Yangtze River. Since that day, Lu Ching had not been able to sit in his office. He quickly flipped over the leaves of the calendar, and pressed a button. A warder appeared.

"Ask Mr. Huang to come here."

He nervously pushed open the window and took a deep breath. Then he had a sudden feeling that this was too risky. Turning back to his desk, he pressed the button several times. It was too late. The warder had gone.

Lu Ching's mind did a quick turn. Why not use this opportunity to drop a few hints about the current situation to the political prisoners and get himself into their good graces? This was quite permissible to a veteran secret agent like himself. Moreover, he might be able to kill two birds with one stone and get the information he wanted at the same time. An excellent idea!

General Huang Yi-sheng walked into the office with a soldierly stride. No sooner had Lu Ching given him an opening, than the general launched into a lengthy discourse. His assurance made Lu Ching feel uncomfortable.

"I have been member of the Kuomintang and a revolutionary since the days of the Revolutionary League. I support Dr. Sun Yat-sen's Three Great Policies.* Chiang Kai-shek's actions are a complete betrayal of Dr. Sun's Three People's Principles!" Huang Yi-sheng paced up and down. "You'll get nowhere with Chiang Kai-shek. His Kuomintang is doomed. Neither the Yanks nor the atom bomb can save it. It's quite different with

* The policies of alliance with Russia, co-operation with the Communist Party and assistance to the peasants and workers.

the Communists. Their policies have the enthusiastic support of the people, and what they do is for the general good. That's why they can't be beaten, they can liberate the whole nation, bringing the hope of prosperity and happiness to the people."

All this made not the least impression on Lu Ching, but he assumed an understanding air and forced himself to sit through Huang Yi-sheng's analysis of the situation. He hoped that his behaviour would incline the general in his favour. Finally he brought up the matter on his mind. "And the Communists' policy towards us at present is. . . ."

General Huang knew in a second what he was driving at. "Why don't you talk to one direct?" he suggested. "Both Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang are new arrivals. They know about the present policy."

Lu Ching shook his head, but did not definitely refuse. "That won't be necessary. The question that interests me most is whether or not the third world war is going to start soon." Lu Ching hoped that the Chinese mainland would become the battlefield in a war between the United States and the Soviet Union, so that he would not need to run off to Taiwan. He deliberately remarked: "The United States is about to send an important delegation."

General Huang sat up. His face wore a blank expression, but now he was in no hurry to leave.

After talking for a while, Lu Ching, smiling somewhat, saw Huang Yi-sheng to the door. Lu Ching had his own plans. It would do him no harm to maintain relations such as these with the political prisoners. He had always despised the Gorilla and the Owl, those dolts at Chatzetung. They did not know how to use their brains in dealing with the Communists. Even his assistant, Yang Chin-hsing, whom the Second Department had sent to help keep an eye on the prisoners, had no notion of how to go about his duties. He had raised a hue and cry the moment he had found out about the cook and the wild onions, leaving Lu Ching no choice but to let him have his own way and kill the man. But he had warned Yang Chin-hsing at the

time not to be as simple-witted as the Owl. He should carry his thoughts in his head and not on his lips, never reveal his intentions, work in the dark and make no moves before weighing the consequences and making certain that the right moment had presented itself. Too bad the old cook had been seized prematurely. By tailing him they might, with a bit of luck, have discovered something. And if he, Lu Ching, had done this when the Second Department and the Special Adviser were finding themselves balked at every turn, he would have had no need to worry over Shen Yang-chai's refusal to speak on his behalf. He would not have been afraid of being left on the mainland. Lu Ching regretted that Yang Chin-hsing's impatience and his own lack of perception had lost them this golden chance.

As Lu Ching sat there lost in his gloomy thoughts, the door was flung open and Yang Chin-hsing rushed in. "Warden! I've found out what they're doing!"

Lu Ching sat up at once, and a smile spread over his face.

Yang Chin-hsing's report dispersed all his worries. He need no longer curry favour with those political prisoners. Here was his chance to distinguish himself. This was how he would get permission to leave for Taiwan or the United States.

The cell door creaked as Yang Chin-hsing burst in accompanied by two warders. Taken by surprise, Liu Sze-yang stood up warily. Cheng Kang, as usual, paid no attention to the enemy agents.

"Don't move!'

The emergency inspection began. After searching the inmates and their pallets, the warders tore the blankets and tossed them on the floor. The room was turned inside out, even the urinal-pail in the corner came in for a close scrutiny.

At the end of half an hour, the disappointed agents walked out and locked the door. They had found nothing suspicious. Staring at the big iron padlock still swinging on its hasp, Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang wondered what was the matter.

Exercise time was cancelled that day. The whole prison was ransacked. The agents had come so unexpectedly and been so vicious, that the comrades wondered what the bloodhounds had smelled out. Was it *Forward*? No, apparently not. They hadn't found the pencil, paper and little knife, nor had they questioned Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang.

Had something gone wrong downstairs? This was hardly possible, as all the comrades there were experienced and always on their guard. . . .

Isolated in their corner cell, Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang were tormented by anxiety and a premonition of danger.

That evening, General Huang failed, for the first time, to send them the newspaper which had always come before with unfailing regularity. During the search, the enemy had gone through everyone of his newspapers looking for missing pages or any other clue, and they had told him that he would not receive any more.

Cheng Kang came to a decision at about midnight, when all the prisoners should have been asleep. He told Liu Sze-yang to keep a look-out by the window, as he intended to make direct contact with the cells downstairs and ask what was up. Cheng Kang went to the drain-pipe, their most secret means of communication. To his dismay no one came to get his message. The pipe had been blocked from below. Their link with the comrades downstairs was broken.

What had happened? Things looked very serious: they were cut off from all sources of information and from any contact with the collective. What were they to do? Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang discussed things anxiously, and decided that they must be prepared for the worst.

A sheet of thin paper lay on the desk in the warden's office. On it was written in precise Sung-style characters:

> Second Plenary Session of Seventh Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party Comes to Successful Conclusion.

Lu Ching, his face an inscrutable mask, picked up the sheet and examined it carefully. It was wrinkled, tattered, and written in indelible pencil. Some of the characters had got wet and were now bluish-violet. Slowly, Lu Ching deciphered it.

> The Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee recently held an eight-day conference near Shihchiachuang.
>
> Chairman Mao Tsetung delivered a report at the conference. . . . Delegates to the conference discussed the question of shifting the centre of the Party's work from the countryside to the cities. . . . The session urged all comrades in the Party to remain modest, prudent and free from arrogance and rashness and to preserve the style of plain living and hard struggle. They would have to put greater efforts into the building up of a new China after the overthrow of the forces of counter-revolution. . . .

This was a document of great historic significance. It brought light to eyes which for years had not seen the sun. It had found its way over high mountains, through an enemy blockade and through a closely-guarded forbidden zone many miles deep, to reach the revolutionaries confined in this innermost fortress of SACO. To the enemy this spelt a terrible threat. They had threatened many times that anyone who carried on "underground activities" or spread "inflammatory propaganda" in the concentration camps would be summarily executed. Yet here was proof that someone had dared to flout their authority and break regulations by copying out this fearsome pamphlet.

"This is a document issued by the Communist Party's Central Committee. The prisoners couldn't have composed it," said Lu Ching, putting down the piece of paper. He paced up and down for a while, his hands clasped behind his back, then stopped and said to Yang Chin-hsing: "There are only two possibilities: one is that Huang Yi-sheng gave them a newspaper, but no pages are missing, and besides, the papers couldn't have printed this. What is more likely is that Liu Sze-yang smuggled it in!"

"The news about Yang Hu-cheng's imprisonment here got out before Liu Sze-yang arrived," Yang Chin-hsing pointed out.

"That's true. There's also a chance that the prisoners are in

direct contact with the Communist Underground." Lu Ching continued confidently: "At any rate, we're now in a position to force our adversaries out in the open."

"It looks very hopeful this time. Should we send in a report first?"

"Not yet," Lu Ching narrowed his eyes and clenched his fist. "We must have a definite lead on the Communist Underground before we do that. We'll show the Special Adviser what we're worth. Bring in the prisoner!"

"Yes, sir." Yang Chin-hsing turned around and barked: "Bring in Hu Hao!"

Hu Hao, the student who watered the trees so diligently every day in the prison yard, was pushed in by several agents. He stood there with his arms pinioned, heavy fetters on his ankles, and his clothes torn. He was bleeding from several wounds.

"Did he talk?" Yang Chin-hsing asked the warders.

"No."

"Come here!"

Hu Hao stepped forward, his head held high. Scowling, Lu Ching picked up the crumpled piece of paper as if it were a bomb about to go off.

"Who wrote this? Who gave it to you?"

Silence. Hu Hao was trying to formulate a reply which would leave the enemy none the wiser. He must not let slip anything that would implicate the person who had given him this paper. Prolonged prison life had taught Hu Hao both profound love and bitter hatred. It had also made him so near-sighted that he had failed to notice the head-warder watching him as he crouched in a corner of his cell with it during exercise time.

"Out with it! Who wrote it?"

"Talk!"

"I did." Hu Hao looked the agent straight in the eye.

"You? You couldn't have done."

With a vicious grin Yang Chin-hsing raised his whip. As Hu Hao was not a Communist, he could not have written out this Central Committee document; nor could any of the prisoners for that matter. There was no doubt about it: the paper had been sent in from outside by the Party Underground. The matter had to be cleared up and the prisoners' outside contacts tracked down, or else the Communists would be virtually in control here.

The whip whistled through the air. He was going to make Hu Hao talk. Once . . . twice. . . . Blood from the tortured flesh trickled to the polished floor. Muffled groans and broken sounds came from the victim.

". . . I wrote it . . . I . . . wrote . . . it. . . ."

Water splashed into the pool of blood. Hands grasped his hair, yanked his head backwards. . . .

"Who wrote it?"

"I did."

The night was far advanced but the screams of the tormented man made sleep impossible for the prisoners. Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang listened with anguish, and learned from the enemy's shouts what it was all about. Their fists were clenched so tightly that their nails dug deep into their palms. They were the ones responsible for that piece of paper, having copied the document from a newspaper sent to them by Huang Yi-sheng. The two had been most careful to return the newspapers every day, but the sheet of paper sent downstairs had been discovered by the head-warder in the hands of the short-sighted Hu Hao. Thinking of the red pepper juice being forced through Hu Hao's nostrils into his lungs, they felt as if they were being choked. The strangling, bloody coughing that followed could choke a man within a few minutes. . . .

"Hu Hao is guiltless," said Liu Sze-yang in distress. "I'll tell them that I brought in the news."

"The conference communiqué hadn't been issued when you came here."

Hysterical screams came through the window. The smoking irons seemed to sear the heart of every listening prisoner.

"When will they stop torturing him?" asked Liu Sze-yang, unable to stand it any longer. "I'll go and admit that I did it and let them shoot me."

"If necessary, I should be the one to go," said Cheng Kang. He paced the dark cell, dragging his fetters. He was not afraid of telling the enemy that he had written that pamphlet. They wanted to know how *Forward* got downstairs. He would hold out to the last and not say a word. Yes, he knew he could. But would such an admission be any use? The enemy knew how to use their brains as well as their whips. If they found out about the drain-pipe, the comrades downstairs and General Huang would all be implicated. This would mean the exposure of the whole collective.

A warder suddenly appeared at the window. "Why aren't you asleep?"

"You're keeping everybody awake."

The enemy's shouts and the bitterness in Liu Sze-yang's eyes almost made Cheng Kang frantic. They were capable of torturing Hu Hao to death. What could be done?

"We must not act on our own without permission from downstairs," he said, almost to himself.

"What's that?" asked Liu Sze-yang.

"We don't have the right to act individually."

"Act individually?" Liu Sze-yang sat up, his eyes wide. Cheng Kang's words were a reminder and an admonition. The muscles of his face were contorted as he strove to calm himself. Gradually reason, resolution and self-restraint gained the upper hand.

After a long silence, Liu Sze-yang reached out for Cheng Kang's hand and said quietly:

"You're right. We must not go."

"The enemy isn't merely trying to find the person who wrote that pamphlet. . . ." Another outburst of shouts stopped Cheng Kang. Then he continued: "Their intention is the same as when

they tried to pump you and me. They want to force open a breach, so as to unearth out Party organization."

"But someone must go out to deal with the enemy. That's the only way to save Hu Hao!"

The enemy's roars did not abate. The agents could not wring anything out of the steadfast Hu Hao, yet they called for more implements of torture, their voices deliberately raised so that the prisoners would hear. Warders were told to keep a very close watch on the prisoners' reactions. Directed by Yang Chin-hsing, their sharp eyes searched every face in the hope of finding someone who could not endure this mental torture, and who would allow himself to be carried away by anger.

The enemy was determined to keep up this provocation until one of two things occurred: either Hu Hao died under torture; or someone came out and confessed. The agents were confident that the latter would happen for they knew that Communists would not let an innocent non-Party member die.

Apart from the old madman, who showed not the slightest reaction, all the prisoners were sunk deep in misery. Unable to bear it any longer, the comrade downstairs who had given the paper to Hu Hao started up, resolved to sacrifice himself, but Chi Hsiao-hsuan, who had remained silent up to now, restrained him and said quietly:

"You don't have to do that. I will go."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan's tones were cool and calculating. Evidently he had thought it over carefully and knew what he was doing: If he had gone out too soon, his action would have failed to lessen Hu Hao's sufferings, and would certainly have aroused the enemy's suspicion. The time was now ripe. The enemy's frenzied roars told him that they were becoming worried and impatient. With a reassuring nod to his comrade, he rose to his feet and called to the warder outside:

"I wish to see the warden!"

His voice was composed. One would have thought that he was unaware of the dangers awaiting him.

"It was I who gave Hu Hao that piece of paper."

Yang Chin-hsing glared wolfishly at Chi Hsiao-hsuan, taking stock of this new adversary.

"Let's go," Chi Hsiao-hsuan said, pushing the door open.

"Wait a minute!" Yang Chin-hsing was not quite sure what to do. He had better talk it over with the warden first. Chi Hsiao-hsuan was an opponent, on whom torture would be useless.

"Warden! We've landed a big fish!" shouted Yang Chin-hsing with excitement as he hurried into the office. "Chi Hsiao-hsuan has come forward!" He paid no attention to Hu Hao lying on the floor.

Lu Ching ordered with a motion of his hand that the unconscious man be taken out.

"Chi Hsiao-hsuan?" he replied at last. "It can't be him."

Lu Ching was sceptical. He had long regarded Chi Hsiao-hsuan as dangerous, but careful watching over a long period had never revealed any suspicious actions on his part. Lu Ching had a feeling that Chi Hsiao-hsuan was covering up for someone else and trying to put him on the wrong scent.

"It may be him." Yang Chin-hsing was convinced that this paper was connected with the leakage of the information about General Yang Hu-cheng. He had suspected long before Liu Sze-yang's arrival that the political prisoners at Pai House maintained close and regular contact with the Party Underground.

"Yes, Chi Hsiao-hsuan is a big fish," Lu Ching finally conceded with a short laugh. "The fact that he's come forward proves that we've spread our nets in the right place and trapped the shoal. If we haul in fast, we'll definitely catch more and bigger ones."

Lu Ching saw himself on the verge of success, and he anticipated that before long he would have the Party organizations in the prison and in Chungking just where he wanted them. Now he had to unmask Chi Hsiao-hsuan and drive him into a corner. Once a hole was knocked in his story, he would break down and confess the truth. Then a lightning follow-up through the breach and victory was his!

Chi Hsiao-hsuan stepped into the warden's office.

"I want the truth," said Lu Ching from his armchair. He pointed with his cigarette at the bloodstains on the floor: "See them?"

Chi Hsiao-hsuan smiled and said calmly: "I wrote it."

Lu Ching also smiled. "Then write a few lines and we'll see."

Secret agents brought paper and pencil and laid them on the desk.

In the past hour, Lu Ching and Yang Chin-hsing had put their heads together and cooked up a fool-proof scheme. Just let that Communist try to pull off another of his tricks! First of all, they would verify whether or not the handwriting on the paper was his.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan glanced at Lu Ching, then walked over to the desk and sat down. He picked up the pencil and smoothed out the paper, then called for a knife and sharpened the lead to a fine point deliberately taking his time. Then he started writing.

Yang Chin-hsing stood behind Chi Hsiao-hsuan and keenly followed each motion. . . . Chi Hsiao-hsuan's pencil moved smoothly, tracing out a few lines of Sung-style characters.

"Enough!" Lu Ching snatched up the sheet of paper and scrutinized it, then thrust it into an envelope together with the original document and turned to a warder. "Take this to the technical laboratory at once!"

The technical laboratory was a special SACO department where a large staff of technicians, under the direction of American intelligence agents, analysed fingerprints, bloodstains and handwriting. Chi Hsiao-hsuan's handwriting was to be compared with that on the document — Cheng Kang's.

Several hours later, the envelope was returned. Tearing it open, Lu Ching read the verdict:

"The handwriting is identical. . . ."

It was not strange that the technical laboratory should arrive at this conclusion. Unknown to anyone, Chi Hsiao-hsuan had

maintained regular contact with a few close comrades in neighbouring cells. When Cheng Kang had been brought to this prison they had informed him about the drain-pipe which had long been in use. It was they who had cut off this line of contact just before the big search, to prevent discovery by the enemy and avoid the prisoners upstairs being involved in the incident of *Forward*. Whenever *Forward* came downstairs, they immediately read and destroyed it. Its contents were passed by word of mouth from one man to another. Only a very few of the most important issues, such as the document on the Second Plenary Session and the order to cross the Yangtze were preserved as no one had the heart to destroy them. As an added precaution, they had told Cheng Kang always to write in the Sung style and omit the title. After the first issue came out, Chi Hsiao-hsuan and his comrades had studied the characteristics of Cheng Kang's handwriting and practised it down to the last detail. Many years of prison life had taught them to prepare for any contingency. As Hu Hao had been caught in his cell, Chi Hsiao-hsuan had stepped forward as previously agreed to protect the Party and his comrades.

Not entirely convinced, the secret agents once more went to Chi Hsiao-hsuan's cell and searched his belongings. Sure enough, they found the stub of an indelible pencil and several sheets of paper in his pillow.

Unable to conceal his triumph, Lu Ching sneered: "Why not tell us how these things came in?"

"They were brought in by outsiders belonging to the Underground, weren't they?" shouted Yang Chin-hsing. "And you sent out the information about Yang Hu-cheng!"

They shook the document in front of Chi Hsiao-hsuan's face. Lu Ching knew that Chi Hsiao-hsuan could not have composed such a document, even though he had been the secretary of a regional committee some years ago.

"Well, how about it? How do you maintain contact with the Party Underground?"

It was to be expected that Lu Ching would now concentrate all his attention on Chi Hsiao-hsuan. Now it had been proved that he had copied the document, it followed that the Party Underground must have sent in the document to him, and he must have sent out the information about Yang Hu-cheng by the same means.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan shook his head, then came out with an explanation that staggered the secret agents. He said that not long ago, on the day they had been busy burning their files, all the warders had gone to help carry things, leaving only two guards downstairs. He was strolling about during exercise time when he chanced to see that the door to the office was open. Stepping into the empty office, he had looked through the newspapers in the hope of finding news about the release of political prisoners, and had unexpectedly come across an article on the opening of the Second Plenary Session of the Seventh Central Committee of the Communist Party.

"Humph, you've got it all off pat, haven't you?" Lu Ching's lips curled.

Yang Chin-Hsing bellowed: "What? You dared to enter my office?" His face became ashen at the thought that he would be held responsible.

"The door was open. Why shouldn't I have walked in?" answered Chi Hsiao-hsuan coolly.

It was true that Yang Chin-hsing often neglected to lock the door.

"That's impossible!" he bawled. "Our newspapers would never carry news about the Communist Party."

"Look through the papers yourselves," Chi Hsiao-hsuan was not in the least perturbed. There was no doubt in his mind that Cheng Kang had copied his information from Huang Yi-sheng's newspaper.

Lu Ching ordered his file of newspapers to be brought in.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan went through them one by one. Some time ago, while the peace talks were being held, the Kuomintang had been obliged to put up a pretence of being "democratic." Press

censorship had been relaxed at times, and some privately-run newspapers had actually printed a few items of information put out by the Hsinhua News Agency. These had been gleefully copied by Cheng Kang.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan scanned the papers for important news items. He must use this opportunity to store up as much information as possible.

"Haven't you found it yet? Perhaps it isn't there after all," Yang Chin-hsing said smugly.

"Let him look," scoffed Lu Ching, lighting a pipe.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan finally pointed to one of the papers. "Look here." It announced in bold headlines:

> Chinese Communist Party Convenes Second Plenary Session of Seventh Central Committee.

The two agents stared at the newspaper in astonishment. As they did not read the papers very carefully, they had never dreamed that Chi Hsiao-hsuan would provide them with such a simple solution. There was nothing more they could say.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan smiled serenely at the discomfited pair.

"Don't you know prison regulations?" shouted the frustrated Lu Ching. "Haven't you heard of the penalty for carrying out seditious propaganda? Don't you know where you are?"

"Yes, I do," Chi Hsiao-hsuan answered in a matter-of-fact voice that was free of fear and hesitation. "This is the Pai House concentration camp."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan was now completely reassured. The enemy could only find out a few unimportant facts about him. They would never know what the Party was doing, nor discover how the information about Yang Hu-cheng had been divulged. The Party's secrets were safe. He looked out of the window. Several white clouds were floating across a blue sky; and the hills in the distance were a rich green.

"I'll tell you one thing," he murmured. "I am a Communist, now and for ever."

Lu Ching sprawled in his armchair smoking one cigarette after another. Hu Hao's blood had been mopped up. Yang Chin-hsing paced angrily up and down, in no mood to talk with Lu Ching.

Submit a report to the Special Adviser? Yang Chin-hsing quailed at the thought. He was the head-warder, and the newspapers had been in his office. How could he disclaim responsibility? Under the merciless discipline of the MIB he would be severely punished for dereliction of duty.

Lu Ching's apprehensions were even greater. He could see no way of clearing himself of a charge of poor administration. He was particularly annoyed because he still very much doubted the truth of the conclusions he had reached. Was Chi Hsiao-hsuan really the culprit? Was the whole affair as simple as it seemed? Yet the handwriting was incontestably his, and the source of information was undoubtedly the newspaper. He was forced to admit that their conclusions appeared to be correct. Still. . . .

"Yes, Warden, it looks as though both you and I are in for disciplinary action," Yang Chin-hsing said meekly as he sat down. "Perhaps we should. . . ."

"Notify all the warders that there will be a meeting tomorrow morning," Lu Ching interrupted. Pausing for a moment, he continued: "From now on no one is to mention that slip of paper."

"Yes, sir!"

A big load fell from Yang Chin-hsing's mind.

"Furthermore," Lu Ching sat up and lit another cigarette, "we must continue searching for their contacts with the Party Underground. In my opinion Liu Sze-yang is the most likely suspect."

"And Cheng Kang too!"

"No, he doesn't figure in this," declared Lu Ching. The American advisers had carefully studied Cheng Kang's statements under the influence of the drug and they maintained that information obtained under such conditions was absolutely re-

liable — no one could possibly question the latest achievements of American science. Such being the case, Cheng Kang's statements proved beyond doubt that he had not been engaged in any particular activities since coming to Pai House.

"You must concentrate on Liu Sze-yang. . . ." After a moment's consideration, Lu Ching decided to adopt new measures. "The Communist forces are advancing rapidly," he said. "Our main job from now on is to prevent jail-breaks by the political prisoners. Reshuffle the prisoners at once and lock up all the Communists in a few cells. Post two guards instead of one and keep a closer watch on them. At present the Communists are scattered all over the place; it can't go on like this. Once they're put together it will be easier to keep an eye on them, and they won't be able to get up too much or find ways of making trouble."

"Nevertheless. . . ." Lu Ching's lowered voice hinted at the complex workings of his mind, but Yang Chin-hsing had not perceived his real intent, so he deliberately added the explanation: "As a tactical measure, it wouldn't hurt to slacken up somewhat on their everyday life. The same thing has been done at Chatzetung."

23

CHENG Kang and Liu Sze-yang had their leg irons and handcuffs taken off and were then ordered to go downstairs to a new cell. Curiosity and happiness filled them as they came down for the first time. It was a joy to be with other comrades, in spite of the stricter watch by the enemy. The prisoners in the lower cells said nothing, but their brief glances conveyed comradely greetings to the newcomers.

The new cell was about twenty feet long and sixteen feet wide, much bigger than the one upstairs. There were only seven people in this cell, including Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang. A cell like this at Chatzetung would have held at least thirty prisoners, but there were fewer political prisoners here. Besides, most of the imprisoned secret agents had recently been released, and those that were left had been shifted to the row of low buildings next to this one, where they were now receiving preferential treatment.

Pai House was a stronger and more securely-built prison than Chatzetung. The walls were of brick and no clothes-lines were allowed to be strung across them. There were many windows, which made it easier to keep the prisoners under observation, but which also had their advantages. They let in more light and air, and made it easy for the inmates to keep an eye on snooping warders.

Their cell was at the lefthand front corner of the building, right beside the flight of stairs which led to the side door and upstairs. One of their windows opened directly on to this staircase, and when the side door was open, it was possible to see what the enemy was doing outside the prison wall. There was a covered walk outside the cells, like the one upstairs.

Below was the prison yard. The door of their cell opened not on to the walk, but on to a corridor inside the building. Cells lined both sides of this corridor, the one just opposite to theirs being Comrade Chi's. The entrance to the corridor faced the yard and the main gates which were always locked. At the other end of the corridor was a wall, in the centre of which hung a big glass-framed portrait of a bald headed Chiang Kai-shek holding a sword. Below it, reactionary slogans defaced the walls. This portrait served a special function for the prisoners. The agents had hung it at a slight angle to the wall, thinking that this would provide a better view of their big boss. But, because of this angle the glass served as a big mirror in the dark corridor, reflecting the bright sunshine and the movements of the agents in the yard.

No sooner had Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang made up their pallets with the help of their cell mates, than a secret agent entered the corridor and walked to the opposite cell.

"Hu Hao, come out. Bring your bedding."

What was happening? Was this another development in the *Forward* incident? Cheng Kang peered out to see what was going on. Some of his cell mates were muttering behind him. He did not turn around, as he felt someone come up. Without turning his head, he said: "Sze-yang, keep your eyes open!"

"What are they up to?"

Hu Hao appeared at the door of his cell, barefoot and carrying his belongings, and he asked testily:

"Where to?"

"Over there. You're changing cells." The warder pointed at the cell where Cheng Kang was.

So that was the answer to the riddle. Cheng Kang understood now that the enemy was afraid. After the *Forward* incident, they did not dare let Hu Hao stay with Comrade Chi any longer. The wary secret agents were trying to forestall possible dangers.

Hu Hao walked across, his face expressionless. The warder opened the cell door, then locked him in.

It was after supper, and dusk slowly fell. The lights in the passageway shone through the grating into the cells, casting a pattern of light and shadow on the floor. Most of the inmates were already asleep, ignoring the tramping boots in the corridor, armed patrols outside the prison wall, and the ominous gloom of the night. Hu Hao and another prisoner were still awake, sitting and talking in the darkest corner.

Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang hadn't gone to sleep either. Their heads close together, they lay motionless with their eyes shut, as if sleeping. No one would have suspected the stealthy exchange of remarks going on between them.

". . . There are too many outsiders over at Comrade Chi's. Two secret agents are locked up in there. . . . They're keeping him under close observation. . . . He can't move a finger. . . ." said Cheng Kang.

"Are there many of our people over there?"

"There's Comrade Chi . . . and three of the students arrested in 1941. . . . With the agents, that makes eight."

"Including Hu Hao, there are eight of us here too."

"All those here are our own people. . . . No secret agents. . . ."

"Yes . . . conditions are favourable. . . ."

Cheng Kang did not answer, probably he was tired. Hu Hao and the other inmate had stopped talking and it wasn't long before Liu Sze-yang also dropped off to sleep. . . .

The sky gradually brightened. Having no watches, the prisoners did not know the exact time, but judging from the angle of the sun's rays, it must have been about seven o'clock. Everyone was already up, tidying up the room. Hu Hao stood at the door and gazed at his former cell. Having spent so many years in it, he felt inexpressibly home-sick, and his eyes conveyed a silent greeting to the comrades there.

Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang were each occupied with his own thoughts. They were still unfamiliar with their new surroundings, and wondering how they would carry on their work? Should they look up Lao Chi during exercise time? Maybe they should wait. The enemy was certain to spot them, if they tried

to get into contact with Chi so soon after coming downstairs.

A warder in the yard blew his whistle for roll-call. The cells were unlocked and the prisoners filed out.

As at Chatzetung, the prisoners were counted each morning and evening. This used to be done in the cells, but a few days ago this had been changed and the morning roll-call now took place in the yard. This also gave the prisoners a few minutes in which they could wash their faces and go to the latrine, so it was in fact, an extra yard-break. The changes in prison routine meant more freedom for Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang than they had enjoyed upstairs.

Yang Chin-hsing called the prisoners' names one by one. After that, he stood to one side of the yard, carefully watching them.

After washing, Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang strolled silently around the yard. Hu Hao, as usual, watered the little trees. Comrade Chi sat in a corner, soaking in the morning sunshine. Lao Yuan, like most of the others, walked back and forth without saying a word. All was the same as yesterday, a month ago, a year ago. . . .

The few minutes passed quickly. The madman Hua Tze-liang brought in breakfast. At the sight of the nervous trembling of his hands and of his tangled white hair, Liu Sze-yang did not know whether to feel contempt or pity.

"Come and eat, Sze-yang!" called Cheng Kang.

Liu Sze-yang was about to turn away from the door when he caught sight of Hua Tze-liang walking down the yard with a bowl of rice. To whom could he be taking it? Why was this food being sent individually? Liu Sze-yang was intrigued, and he remained at the grating. After a while, he saw the madman at the mouth of the tunnel next to the low buildings. A light was turned on and the madman disappeared through the entrance. Was someone locked up there? Why hadn't Cheng Kang ever mentioned it? He waited until the madman came out again. This time the bowl, a white and blue one, was empty. Liu Sze-yang remembered distinctly seeing him go

in with a white one. He was convinced that someone was imprisoned in that tunnel. But who could it be? Liu Sze-yang wanted very much to know, but it was inconvenient to ask Cheng Kang or Hu Hao just now.

He turned away from the door. Cheng Kang had already filled his bowl with rice. The madman couldn't even cook it properly: Part of it was burned and part still hard.

After breakfast Liu Sze-yang gave Cheng Kang a whispered account of what he had seen and asked if he knew anything about it.

Cheng Kang did not answer right away. The first time he had heard about the unknown comrade in that dungeon was when Little Turnip told him, just before leaving for Kweichow. Not being very clear about the facts at the time, he had felt it inadvisable to tell Liu Sze-yang. But now, seeing that his companion had stumbled upon something, Cheng Kang thought it no longer necessary to keep silent, though he had very little to add.

"Shall we ask Hu Hao? Perhaps he knows," Liu Sze-yang suggested.

Cheng Kang hesitated, doubting whether Hu Hao knew anything. He had reported Little Turnip's findings to the comrades downstairs, but had received no reply, nor had he been asked to do anything about it.

Liu Sze-yang told Hu Hao what he had seen, but the latter could not enlighten him either. He could only supply some odd bits of information. "He's been there several months now," he said. "Food is always sent to him individually. A warder used to take it in, but lately the madman has been going instead."

"Where's the old cook?" asked Liu Sze-yang suddenly.

"I don't know." Hu Hao became thoughtful. "He was brought here many years ago against his will to cook for the prisoners. He was a very kind-hearted man. I'm worried. . . ."

The madman had finished his work and was now trotting around the prison yard. Watching him, Liu Sze-yang asked Hu Hao:

"Did Hua Tze-liang run around like this before he went out of his mind?"

"He's been doing it ever since the first day I came here. They say he's kept it up for more than a dozen years now."

"Do you know him well?"

Hu Hao shook his head. "I've never heard him say a word to anyone. We were cell mates for five years, but he never once talked. Rain or shine, wind or snow, he always pounds around the yard when we go out for exercise. I remember one year when there were heavy rains, and the yard was flooded, but he kept on sloshing through the puddles although he was soaked to the skin. But when he's in the cell, he sits absolutely still, with his eyes shut, like some strange object made of clay or wood. His appearance changed completely after he went mad. The first few months, he'd tremble at the sight of a warder. . . ."

That was all Hu Hao knew about Hua Tze-liang. He lowered his eyes. Only then did Liu Sze-yang discovered that Hu Hao had a book in his hands.

During the year Liu Sze-yang had been at Chatzetung, his only reading had been the study materials compiled by the prisoners, never newspapers or other printed matter. Since coming to Pai House, he and Cheng Kang often talked of things they had studied, but he had never seen a book here. Overjoyed, Liu Sze-yang snatched the book from Hu Hao and read the title.

"Where does this come from?" Liu Sze-yang was astounded.

"What?" It was Hu Hao's turn to be surprised. "All this time you've been here and you don't know about the library?"

"A library? Honestly?"

"It's a fact."

"For everybody?"

"For everybody."

"Where?"

"I'll take you in a minute. You can borrow some books too."

"How terrific!"

Liu Sze-yang wanted to shout for joy. A library in this dismal concentration camp!

"Cheng Kang, do you know that there's a library here?" As he spoke, he saw that Cheng Kang too was holding a book that he had just got from another prisoner. Cheng Kang smiled and said nothing.

A cell mate said softly: "You'll find plenty there."

Silence reigned in the prison. Strolling to the door, Liu Sze-yang discovered that nearly all the prisoners were quietly reading in their cells. It dawned upon him that these men not only waged a complicated struggle, but also persevered in political studies. At Chatzetung, he had often thought that if it were possible to get books, he would arm himself with knowledge. Men could lose their freedom, but not their ability to think. The intense study done by the comrades were in itself a form of struggle against the enemy.

How did there happen to be a library in this fearful prison? Liu Sze-yang found it hard to explain, but of one thing he was certain: it must have been won by his comrades after years of struggle.

When exercise time came around Liu Sze-yang and Cheng Kang followed Hu Hao towards the library. Liu Sze-yang felt his heart pounding, and was as keyed up as if they were embarking on an exciting adventure.

The library was an ordinary cell tucked away in the back of the building. The door was still locked.

"Lao Yuan is the librarian," said Hu Hao. "He'll be here any moment now."

Liu Sze-yang remembered hearing from Cheng Kang that Lao Yuan had been brought there from the Shangjao concentration camp and that the enemy didn't know his real name.

Lao Yuan soon came. He opened the door, walked in ahead of them and sat down silently at the librarian's desk.

The room was dark as its only source of light was a small window. The place had a strong musty odour, and dust and cobwebs were everywhere. It looked more like a corner in an

abandoned fortress than a library. Torn books and ragged magazines were piled untidily on sagging shelves. The room was so crowded with bulky bookcases that there was scarcely room to breathe. The narrow aisles between them were cluttered with stacks of yellowed periodicals, so that one could only squeeze through them. None of the books had been numbered or classified. Clouds of dust flew up every time something was dragged out of one of the disorderly heaps. As he stood at the door, Liu Sze-yang sneezed several times. Why had the prisoners allowed the place to get so dusty? Why didn't they keep those bookshelves tidy? The librarian ought to keep the books in order, or at least clear up the mess on the floor!

Hu Hao and Cheng Kang had disappeared among the bookcases, and after a moment's hesitation Liu Sze-yang too plunged in amid the dusty litter, impelled by a burning desire for something to read.

All the books were stained with age. Liu Sze-yang searched among them a long time. They bore, almost exclusively, such titles as *Hitler — the Great Man of Our Day, My Autobiography — By Mussolini, Speeches by the Generalissimo, A General Outline of Secret Service Work, Intelligence, Espionage Techniques, The Essentials of Psychological Warfare, A Study of Methods of Trailing, Dactylography,* and *Manual on Demolition.* Liu Sze-yang had no wish to even touch such books. He came across some English books, mostly pocket editions printed for the American armed forces during the Second World War. They were chiefly westerns and novels with vulgar, sexy illustrations on their covers. Liu Sze-yang passed those over too. After that he discovered a shelf with dictionaries. There were the *Kanghsi Dictionary, Cyclopedia,* and an *Everyday English-Chinese Dictionary,* as well as dictionaries in French, German and other foreign languages, all thrown together. Liu Sze-yang thought this a pity, and began to re-arrange them. In doing so, he came across a concise dictionary of philosophical terms. Leafing through it, he saw that it was just what he wanted.

Happy, he thrust it under his arm. Then he tucked a copy of *Rudin* under his arm. He had found it among some works by Turgenev. Liu Sze-yang would have liked to stay longer, but the dust was too much for him. He handed the books to Lao Yuan, who did not check them, but pushed forward the register for Liu Sze-yang to write down the titles and his signature.

There was a writing-brush and an enormous brass inkbox on the desk, objects he had not seen since his arrest. He picked up the brush, and with stiff movements signed his name, then hurried out of the stifling hole. Once out in the sunshine Liu Sze-yang drew in some deep breaths of fresh air. It was like waking up from an oppressive nightmare. He would never have believed such a dreadful library existed.

Cheng Kang also came out, two books under his arm and his hair grey with dust.

Back in the cell Liu Sze-yang couldn't help remarking:

"That place really ought to be swept out."

Cheng Kang glanced at Liu Sze-yang. "What, haven't you realized yet?"

"Realized what?"

"Just think," said Cheng Kang, "what a lovely place that is. Would a secret agent ever want to stick his nose in there?"

Liu Sze-yang burst out laughing. "What a fool I was not to realize."

Liu Sze-yang opened the dictionary of philosophical terms. What a long time it was since he had read anything like this. The book was like an old friend arriving to lighten the burden of his misfortune. As he greedily scanned the pages he could not help wishing that the comrades at Chatzetung could have such books. His eyes lit on such terms as "monism," "truth," "materialist world outlook," "the unity of opposites," "from quantitative changes to qualitative changes," "race," "state".... They stimulated his mind, and he sat thinking for a long time. The cell was very quiet; everyone was reading.

After a while, Liu Sze-yang picked up *Rudin.* It was printed

on coarse, locally-made paper. The greyish-brown cover had been torn and then mended. A line of brushwriting on the flyleaf read:

"Bad paper, but excellent contents. Please take care."

Who had written this? Liu Sze-yang, curious, turned the pages and found several sheets of white paper interspersed among the coarser ones. Upon closer examination he found that someone had replaced some missing pages, after copying their contents with a meticulous hand. Comparing them with the writing on the flyleaf, Liu Sze-yang came to the conclusion that they were by the same person. Who was the responsible, conscientious reader who had written that injunction, setting such a fine example himself?

Liu Sze-yang approached Hu Hao, asking: "Who wrote this?"

Hu Hao held the book close to his near-sighted eyes.

"Che Yao-hsien," he said. "Books are hard to come by. This library was won in a prisoners' struggle led by Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien."

Liu Sze-yang heard about Lo and Che from Elder Brother at Chatzetung, but he was quite surprised to see Che Yao-hsien's handwriting in Pai House.

"It happened at the Hsifeng concentration camp the year the Japanese were defeated," Hu Hao continued. "Because of the negotiations between the Kuomintang and the Communist Party conditions were favourable, so Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien organized a struggle and forced the enemy to set up a library. The books were those confiscated from people arrested by the Kuomintang, and the secret agents threw in some old ones of their own. They were put under Che Yao-hsien's charge. Later, the Hsifeng prisoners were brought to Pai House and the library came with them. Che Yao-hsien used to spend some time every day pasting and mending books. You'll find his handwriting in many of them. His big brass inkbox is still there. . . ."

"Sze-yang, look at this! What a find!"

Liu Sze-yang turned around to find Cheng Kang gazing raptly at a book.

"What is it?"

Cheng Kang let him see the title: *One Man's View of a New World.*

"Let me have it when you're through."

Cheng Kang nodded.

"What else did you borrow?"

"*Random Translations.*"

"By Tsou Tao-fen?"

"Yes."

"Let me read it first." Liu Sze-yang skimmed through the book. It was one that had been published before the war. Among the many illustrations was an excellent portrait of Karl Marx, the founder of the revolutionary teachings of the proletariat. Struck by an idea, Liu Sze-yang asked Hu Hao if he could find him a brush and some paper. Hu Hao nodded. After exercise time that afternoon, Hu Hao brought him a brush with a very short handle, a tiny slab of ink and a piece of white paper, folded very small.

Crouched in a corner and hiding his movements with his body, Liu Sze-yang bit the end of the brush to soften it, wet the ink with saliva and then slowly copied Marx's portrait on the paper. He produced a remarkable likeness. Then he made a paste with some rice grains he had saved, and stuck the drawing on the dilapidated cover of *Random Translations.*

Pleased with his efforts, Liu Sze-yang exclaimed: "Look, Cheng Kang, what do you think of that?"

"The agents will notice it."

"Oh hardly. They probably couldn't even recognize it," Liu Sze-yang replied. "Besides, they never go to the library."

But Cheng Kang shook his head disapprovingly.

Liu Sze-yang was quite excited. He found inspiration all around him; the long tradition of struggle here was an unlimited source of strength to him.

That night he could not sleep. He lay still with his eyes shut,

his mind seething with memories, reflections and hopes. During the two days downstairs, he had already seen and learned so many new things. He felt like a recruit just come to the battlefield, bewildered, and hardly able to restrain his eagerness.

Something rustled beside him. Liu Sze-yang half opened his eyes. Hu Hao was groping around in the dark. He saw him pulling at a floorboard and, strangely enough, it came up under his fingers. Hu Hao thrust his hand into the opening, drew out a sheaf of papers, and, after extracting several sheets, put the sheaf back in the hole and covered it up again. He did this swiftly, skilfully and with scarcely a sound. Hu Hao was now lying on his side as if asleep. Actually he was holding a brush and writing painstakingly, his near-sighted eyes almost against the paper. . . .

Liu Sze-yang wanted to ask Hu Hao what he was doing, but decided not to disturb him. He did not go to sleep the whole night.

Hu Hao wrote continuously until nearly daybreak, then put the paper and brush back underneath the floorboards, turned around and dropped asleep.

Another day passed, but Liu Sze-yang did not get an opportunity to find the answers to the questions on his mind.

Evening came, then night, and Liu Sze-yang watched Hu Hao writing till daybreak again. Evidently this was not something that only happened occasionally. Liu Sze-yang had already noticed that Hu Hao fell fast asleep and began snoring as soon as it was dusk; but the snores stopped at midnight, when he would immediately set to work. He could not wake up so punctually if it were not a habit of long standing.

After roll-call the next morning, Liu Sze-yang told Cheng Kang what he had seen the last two nights.

"Leave him alone," advised Cheng Kang.

"But what's he doing so secretly?" queried Liu Sze-yang. "He's not a Communist."

"He's writing something," said Cheng Kang, "and has been at it several years."

"Isn't that risky?"

"He's probably using cyphers and symbols which only he can understand. He's been urged to give it up, but he won't," explained Cheng Kang. "However, he's very cautious about it."

"I saw what he was doing the very first night."

"Well, he wasn't trying to hide it from you."

Liu Sze-yang hadn't thought of that. "Let me talk to him about it," he said.

"Don't. It's not necessary."

Then changing the subject, Cheng Kang said seriously: "We've had Party orders to increase our vigilance and cut down on open activities. We have also to study carefully documents on the rectification campaign. . . ." And in a whisper: "The enemy is keeping the closest watch over you, so don't go out too much. And be careful when you're reading. Don't let the enemy discover anything."

Cheng Kang took the book containing study materials on the rectification campaign from under his blanket. The cover from a Chinese geography was pasted over it. "This is for you, Liu Sze-yang. Hide it under the floorboards when you're not reading it."

"In Hu Hao's hiding place?"

"No, in our corner. The second floorboard from the wall — that short one — can be lifted at one end. There are also some books in a hole in the wall. You'll find the *Communist Manifesto* and the *History of the CPSU (B.)* there. . . . Move the brick in your corner aside and you'll feel them."

They said no more and Liu Sze-yang went on reading until exercise time.

Everyone went out for a stroll. Liu Sze-yang hid his book and stepped out of the cell. He thought that he caught a glimpse of Cheng Kang disappearing through the library door.

Comrade Chi came out of his cell, passed Liu Sze-yang and also made for the library.

Liu Sze-yang peered around, and saw that the two warders on duty were gossiping and no others were about. He judged

this a good opportunity to borrow some more books. Cheng Kang and Lao Chi were there, and perhaps they could recommend something.

Liu Sze-yang walked towards the library. Lao Yuan leaned against the door-jamb, reading some Tang dynasty poetry from a book, and apparently enjoying himself.

> The moon hangs low in the frosty sky; the crows are cawing,
> The fishermen's lamp and the maples by the river face the desolate sleeper,
> Moored beside the Han Shan temple near Soochow
> The sound of the bell comes to the boat at midnight.

Liu Sze-yang stepped in. Lao Yuan did not look at him, but continued reading aloud.

> You ask when I shall return. I do not know.
> Night rain in the Pa Mountains swells the autumn stream.
> When again shall we trim the candle beside the western window,
> And remember how rain fell tonight in the Pa Mountains?

Liu Sze-yang looked down dark aisles between the dusty bookcases. No one was about. Hadn't Cheng Kang and Lao Chi come in? He'd seen them come this way with his own eyes, but now, only a few minutes later, they had disappeared. Mystified, he stood among the piles of books.

Outside, Lao Yuan's voice kept droning. . . .

Liu Sze-yang was disappointed. Going out, he passed the shelf where he had placed the books Cheng Kang had asked him to return. On impulse, he decided to look once more at the one with Marx's portrait on the cover. He searched for it, but it was not there. Had someone borrowed it? Then he remembered Hu Hao telling him that some of the books were kept among the stacks of old paper. The prisoners carefully extracted them so as not to disturb the dust, and hid them again in the same way. Liu Sze-yang rummaged through a heap of magazines, and sure enough, several books came to light. He selected a copy of *Anti-Dühring* and returned the rest.

Liu Sze-yang went to the librarian's desk and was about to

sign for the book when Lao Yuan stopped reading, turned his head, and said:

"You don't have to sign for books not on the shelves."

Liu Sze-yang hesitantly put down the brush, thinking that it was strange that Lao Yuan, who had been reading Tang poetry all this time, knew that the book hadn't come from the shelves. Liu Sze-yang flipped casually through the register, and noticed that all the titles were of books that the enemy would not be interested in.

Setting down the register, Liu Sze-yang had a shock. On the desk lay *Random Translations*, the book he had returned yesterday, but the portrait of Marx had disappeared, and the cover had been torn off. Who had done that? And who had put it on the desk? Liu Sze-yang was quite certain that it had not been there when he came in.

"Comrade Sze-yang!"

Liu Sze-yang looked up into a pair of reproving eyes. "You shouldn't do things which might draw the enemy's attention. The least tendency to slacken vigilance and to take the enemy lightly may have to be paid for in blood." Lao Yuan added sternly: "What you did is not a sign of courage, nor has it anything in common with heroism and contempt for the enemy."

Then he continued to read the poetry as if nothing had happened.

Liu Sze-yang walked off, his face burning at the reproof. Yet he was sincerely grateful. Only a true Marxist-Leninist would have given him such well-meaning criticism to help him overcome his shortcomings. With such help he could improve himself and become a firm and seasoned fighter for the revolution.

Lao Yuan continued to read in measured cadence:

> A jug of wine amidst flowers;
> Alone I drink without friends.
> I raise my cup unto the moon,
> And with my shadow we are three.

24

ALTHOUGH Liu Sze-yang had not found Cheng Kang and Chi Hsiao-hsuan in the library, they were there — not among the dusty bookshelves, but below them, under the floor.

The nails of one small section of the floor — as in many cells — had been pulled out many years ago by the prisoners, to give access to a secret meeting-place. The enemy had never discovered it, and even old prisoners did not know about its existence. It was used only very occasionally by a small number of comrades, when the Party organization had most important matters to discuss.

This highly secret meeting-place was in the lowest part of the building, beneath the floor of the cells downstairs. On all four sides were the massive stone slabs, pillars and brick walls of the foundation that carried the weight of the whole building. Overhead, beams and closely-joined planks formed the floor of the rooms above. The ventilation openings in the maze of intersecting walls had been enlarged, so that it was possible to walk under any of the cells on the ground floor. The dank interior was filled with broken tiles, bricks, stones, and other debris left by the masons.

The floorboards above them had been replaced. Cheng Kang sat on a pile of mildewed tiles against a stone pillar. It was dark in this cellar, and the faint light filtering through the narrow air-holes between the foundation blocks was barely enough for him to be able to distinguish Chi Hsiao-hsuan's lean, pensive face.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan was speaking:

"I've studied the news Lu Ching disclosed to Huang Yi-sheng," he said. "Washington is undoubtedly sending a secret

delegation, and an American-trained demolition unit is on the way. . . ."

Cheng Kang cudgelled his brains. How could they send out General Huang's information? SACO was engineering a new plot. The U.S.-Chiang secret agents were planning to blow up factories, power stations, and key bridges, as well as set Chungking on fire, before they retreated, so as to reduce this populous city to a heap of rubbles. They had to warn the Party Underground as soon as possible, or else the biggest city in the Southwest might be destroyed.

Comrade Chi was about to go on, when overhead the librarian, Lao Yuan, began reciting:

> The moon hangs low in the frosty sky; the crows are cawing,
> The fishermen's lamp and the maples by the river face the desolate sleeper,
> Moored beside the Han Shan temple near Soochow
> The sound of the bell comes to the boat at midnight.

"Someone's there," whispered Chi Hsiao-hsuan, listening to the voice coming through the floor. Cheng Kang sat motionless, with bated breath.

> When again shall we trim the candle beside the western window,
> And remember how rain fell tonight in the Pa Mountains?

"One of our people," said Chi Hsiao-hsuan.

"Probably Liu Sze-yang," guessed Cheng Kang.

After a while, Lao Yuan began another poem.

> A jug of wine amidst flowers;
> Alone I drink without friends.

"He's gone." Then Chi Hsiao-hsuan continued:

"Since liberating Shanghai and Wuhan, the People's Liberation Army has been driving south into Kwangtung and Fukien. They are heading for Lanchow and Urumchi in the Northwest and the campaign to liberate the Southwest is about to start. The enemy's panic and frenzy is quite understandable. Chiang Kai-shek has come to Chungking, partly to prepare for a last-ditch defence, but, primarily, to carry out the American im-

perialists' decision to wreck and lay waste the industries and cities of the Southwest. Chungking's factories, the Tzekung salt mines and the big southwestern cities of Chengtu, Kunming and Kweiyang — all these are targets of enemy destruction. The sooner we send out the information, the more time the Party will have to expose the enemy's plot and mobilize the masses to protect the cities. . . ."

"Yes, and the day of liberation is obviously getting closer." Cheng Kang had heard Liu Sze-yang mention the preparations for the prison break at Chatzetung, and Lao Chi had just told him about similar plans here. He realized that it was imperative to let the Chungking Party organization know how the arrangements were proceeding, so he remarked: "We must get in touch with the Party Underground if we're to co-ordinate with our comrades at Chatzetung and make a break-out at the same time."

"The first thing to do is to send out Huang's information," declared Chi Hsiao-hsuan. "It's clear that our immediate task is to restore contact with the Party Underground without delay."

The fact that contact between the Pai House prisoners and the Chungking Underground had recently been severed weighed heavily on Chi Hsiao-hsuan's mind. Formerly, the old cook had carried messages for them. He was a native of Kweichow, who had come under the Party's influence and guidance after the secret agents brought him into the concentration camp at Hsifeng. He had volunteered to take secret messages in and out, and although the prisoners had frequently advised him not to betray his sympathy for them in small, everyday matters, he had insisted on bringing them pickled vegetables and so on. Now that the agents had murdered him, the prisoners had lost their only link with the outside. Before taking any new measures, however, Chi Hsiao-hsuan wanted to find out how things stood in Chungking. That was why he had decided to talk to Cheng Kang, a recently arrested prisoner at Pai House.

"We cannot run the risk of using the same address as the old cook did. Do you know of a reliable one?" Chi asked.

"Yes, I do," Cheng Kang replied. "But how will the messages be sent out?"

"There's still one man able to pass freely in and out of SACO."

"Who?"

"The new cook, Hua Tze-liang."

"What? The madman? Why, a few gunshots were enough to scare him out of his wits. How can a man like that deliver messages for us? He's completely unreliable."

"We've been keeping him under observation for many years now," said Chi Hsiao-hsuan thoughtfully. "There's been nothing out of the ordinary in his behaviour."

"Was he a Party member before his arrest?"

"We can't find out . . . but we know that he is from northern Szechuan."

Cheng Kang felt that Comrade Chi's statement corroborated his own views, so he said without hesitation:

"At best he was an ordinary civilian from the old Szechuan-Shensi Soviet Area whom the enemy arrested by mistake. We cannot possibly entrust him with Party secrets."

"Why?"

"Under exceptional conditions a man can carry on the struggle alone, but no one would choose to do so if there were any alternative. The most painful thing for us is to lose contact with the Party. I've had a taste of it. It was only a month or so, between the time when the Party withdrew its office from Chungking and Lao Hsu re-established contact with me. That month seemed like a year. Hua Tze-liang was arrested fifteen years ago, but everyone knows that he has neither tried to approach anyone nor ever shown the inclination to do so — not even now, on the eve of the PLA's advance into the Southwest!"

"What other reasons have you?"

"He's demented, and his conduct is unnatural."

"And what makes you think it's unnatural?"

"If it's necessary in order to deceive the enemy, Communists can conceal both anger and grief," asserted Cheng Kang, "but

when the old cook was killed, when Hu Hao was tortured, everybody was cut up about it except him. No, his emotions and feelings are different from ours. We have nothing in common with him."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan shook his head in disagreement.

"I feel. . . ."

Lao Yuan started to read poetry again. Cheng Kang's face paled. This time it was a danger signal.

"Lao Chi, go and hide!"

Cheng Kang picked up a stone. A shaft of light fell on the heap of tiles as the floorboard was raised. A man lowered himself through the opening, his white beard gleaming in the faint light.

"Hua Tze-liang!" Cheng Kang's heart missed a beat. He lunged forward to knock out this intruder.

"Steady on," said Hua Tze-liang, waving his hand. The demented look had gone from his eyes. He turned to Chi Hsiao-hsuan with a smile: "I've been looking for you."

Looking for Lao Chi? Cheng Kang tried to get a stranglehold on Hua Tze-liang.

"Wait a minute," Chi Hsiao-hsuan said quietly. Cheng Kang turned around and met Lao Chi's eyes. Chi nodded for him to let go.

"Who are you?" Chi asked.

Hua Tze-liang stepped forward and said clearly:

"A Communist Party member."

"Why have you come here?"

"The Party needs me now."

"Who do you want?"

"The secretary of the special Party branch, Comrade Chi Hsiao-hsuan."

"Who told you he was secretary?"

"Comrade Lo Shih-wen."

"When?"

"On the 18th of October, 1946, the day I accompanied Lo Shih-wen and Che Yao-hsien to the execution ground," replied

Hua Tze-liang calmly. "Fifteen years ago, I was the Party secretary of the Mount Huaying base area. Comrade Lo Shih-wen was secretary of the Provincial Committee. I worked under him. The enemy didn't know who I was, they considered me merely a suspicious character. When we were taken out to be shot, Comrade Lo Shih-wen guessed that the enemy was taking me along for a mock execution, to find out whether I was a Communist or not. Lo Shih-wen told me to pretend to go mad. I was to deceive the enemy and prepare for long-term concealment. So when the guns went off, I became a madman."

Cheng Kang unclenched his fists. Chi Hsiao-hsuan continued questioning.

"Why are you getting in touch with us at this particular moment?"

"Comrade Lo Shih-wen gave me a special mission. I was not to approach anyone until it became absolutely necessary."

"And what if I had no longer been alive?"

"In case of your death, I was to look up the succeeding Party secretary, Comrade Lao Yuan."

"Your mission?"

Convince the enemy that I was out of my mind. After that, establish contact with the underground Party organization, and complete the task of breaking out of prison and the enemy's encirclement."

Cheng Kang gazed respectfully at Hua Tze-liang, the man who had pretended to be insane for so many years. What foresight; what patience, stoicism and perseverance were embodied in this old comrade!

Chi Hsiao-hsuan posed a new question.

"Your password?"

Hua Tze-liang replied instantly: "Let us hail that great day!"

Chi Hsiao-hsuan's eyes became moist. He and Lao Yuan had been told this password by Comrade Lo Shih-wen, when the latter appointed Chi Hsiao-hsuan secretary of the special Party branch just before his death. It was the last sentence of Chairman Mao's "On Coalition Government," a copy of which the

underground Party organization had secretly sent in at the time. Now it was clear why Hua Tze-liang had refrained from getting in contact with the organization all these years. He had correctly fulfilled his orders and acted in the best interests of the Party under the *most difficult* and complex circumstances.

"Comrade, you've come at just the right time! Now I know why you've been running around the yard all these years: you've been training for the prison break!"

Hua Tze-liang tightly grasped Chi Hsiao-hsuan's hand.

"I know that you and Lao Yuan have been keeping me under observation all these years, but it has only just become possible for me to get in touch with the underground Party organization in Chungking. . . ." Hua Tze-liang drew a folded piece of paper from his pocket and handed it to Chi Hsiao-hsuan. "This is a message from the comrade in the dungeon."

"So you've managed to get in touch with him!" There was a tremor in Chi Hsiao-hsuan's usually calm voice as he asked, "Who is he?"

"Hsu Yun-feng."

"Lao Hsu!" Cheng Kang was overwhelmed. "He's in the dungeon?"

Hua Tze-liang nodded.

Before opening Hsu Yun-feng's note, Chi Hsiao-hsuan asked Hua Tze-liang:

"What do you want now?"

"An address."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan turned questioningly towards Cheng Kang. The answer came quick and clear:

"Number 318, Linsen Road. The Anping Life Insurance Company."

A gloomy darkness filled the chill, dank dungeon. Layer upon layer of rock and stone kept out sunshine and air, and all sight or sound of human activity. It was like a sealed coffin deep in the bowels of the earth.

Year in and year out, the only sound in this mystery-shrouded

pit was that of water seeping through the crevices between the rocks and dripping monotonously to the ground.

Hsu Yun-feng had already been buried for many months in this living tomb, where hope itself was almost stifled. Yet concealed as he was from the world, he was not forgotten, either by his comrades or by the enemy. For a long time after his arrival at Pai House, the other prisoners had been unable to learn his name, but the mere mention of "the comrade in the dungeon" and the fact that food was being sent to him every day — proof that he was clinging tenaciously to life — filled the prisoners with respect and admiration. Only a most steadfast Communist could frighten the enemy to such a degree that they dared not even announce his name, much less let anyone see him, in spite of the thick walls and electrified fences surrounding this concentration camp.

There were no days and no nights here. Time dragged on endlessly, second by second, in impenetrable darkness. After Hsu Yun-feng recovered consciousness, the darkness and loneliness began to torment him. No comrades, no possibility of carrying on the struggle, and for a long time no knowledge of where he was nor how long he had been here. One thing he remembered clearly was that he had left Chatzetung on New Year's Day, 1949. The memory of the jubilant victory celebrations would for ever remain fresh in his mind — more vividly than all the subsequent tortures he had undergone — and this memory sustained him in his solitary struggle.

He had much time for reflection in the silence of the dungeon, and he thought of the past, and of the future. He thought of how he, a cruelly exploited worker and the victim of every kind of persecution, had become a revolutionary; he thought of the Party, of the cave he had lived in when studying at Yenan, and of his excitement upon seeing Chairman Mao for the first time. He also thought of the coming victory and of the magnificent socialist construction that would follow. Most of his thoughts, however, centred on the current struggle; this difficult, complicated struggle. . . .

He had carefully felt each stone in his dungeon and impressed its shape on his mind, in order to acquaint himself with his surroundings. He was now familiar with every nook and cranny. As he was living in darkness, touch had gradually come to replace vision and he could "see" things around him. The dungeon was quite large; it must have held many a staunch man in the past. His guess was confirmed when he found a pair of corroded leg irons in a rotting pile of hay. The rusted metal still bore marks of having been worn through by rubbing against a sharp rock. This was evidence of the struggle of some unknown comrade. A warm glow spread through Hsu Yun-feng's heart.

Perhaps the enemy considered this dungeon secure, for there were no guards here. Hsu Yun-feng had felt from the very first that it would be a weakness and a mistake not to take full advantage of this carelessness on the enemy's part. Miracles do not happen, but a stubborn, determined fighter can accomplish things which seem impossible under ordinary circumstances. Could he dig a tunnel to safety? It was a bold thought, and seemed well-nigh impossible, but he resolved to try it, although he had no idea what other obstacles might face him beyond the stone walls. Feeling around in the darkness, he thoroughly explored the dungeon, trying to gauge its position. Then, seated on a pile of hay facing the iron door of the dungeon, he thought long and hard. Under his feet was solid rock which no man could hope to dig through. The rough, jagged wall on his right was also of rock. On the wall behind him, the rocky portion sloped down until it met the floor at the foot of the left wall. This and the wall facing him consisted of irregularly-shaped slabs. Clearly, the dungeon was built against a cliff, so there might be a way out either to the left, or in front of him. But facing him was the iron door leading into the tunnel through which the enemy passed, leaving the left wall the only alternative. He had no way of finding out what lay beyond it, and did not know whether the wall consisted of one or more thicknesses of slabs.

Hsu Yun-feng then repeatedly probed the left wall and finally found a slightly wider space between slabs just beneath the third one counting from the far corner. As he dug his finger into the crack, a bit of damp mortar fell out. This discovery helped him to make up his mind.

The days passed. Blood dripped from his lacerated fingers, but still he scraped away. The deeper he got into the crack, the slower his progress. The fetters on his wrists and ankles impeded his movements and the narrowness of the opening made it hard for him to insert his hands. Yet no difficulties could deter him from this stupendous struggle.

He was certain that he was imprisoned in some SACO concentration camp. Perhaps this was Pai House, that hell-hole with which the enemy had threatened him. But no matter where he was, he could not be the only prisoner. The escape route he was digging might do for other comrades too. If such a thing were possible, he would prefer to keep it as a reserve exit for them, when they made their break for freedom, rather than use it himself. What an unexpected stroke of luck that the enemy had decided to lock him up here.

He broke half an iron ring from the rusted fetters he had found and used it as a tool. The urge to do something for his comrades kept him stubbornly and tirelessly at his task.

The only interruption in his labours was when the bearded, white-haired old chap in prisoner's garb came once a day with his food. He did not seem quite right in the head and would stare fixedly at Hsu Yun-feng without ever saying a word. But the strange thing was that the old man often left the electric light burning when he went out. Hsu Yun-feng could not tell whether this was intentional or not. Perhaps he did it purposely to let him have a moment of light.

Now everything was clear. Hsu Yun-feng had seldom felt so happy in his life. Yesterday he had got in touch with the Party through Hua Tze-liang. Cheng Kang and Liu Sze-yang were here, as were many other comrades he did not know, but with whom he was united in deep mutual understanding.

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He was no longer isolated. In his joy, Hsu Yun-feng wrote a brief message to the Party organization at Pai House and let Hua Tze-liang take it out. He had known before his arrest that a special Party branch existed at Pai House because it had secret though not very regular contact with the Municipal Committee. He was not aware, however, that this contact had been broken, and that a new means of liaison had yet to be found. He was hoping to hear about matters when the special Party branch sent him a reply.

As Hsu Yun-feng lay on the pile of rotting hay, digging away with the piece of iron ring, his mind was full of far-reaching plans for the future. The primary task of the prison Party organization was to preserve the comrades for future Party work. There was only one possible way of getting the prisoners out of SACO alive, and that was by organizing a prison-break. He had thought about this long ago, and had discussed it with Elder Brother when he was in Chatzetung. What worried him most was how to choose the right moment for the attempt. Chungking was a big city with large numbers of troops and police and excellent communications, while SACO was the headquarters of the U.S.-Chiang secret agents. Premature action would only result in complete suppression. The best time might be on the eve of liberation, when the People's Liberation Army was bearing down in force, and the panic-stricken enemy had his hands too full with other things. The choice was a difficult one. They must not act prematurely; on the other hand, if they waited too long, there was the danger that the enemy might carry out a planned massacre before running away. Moreover, choosing the right time was not enough to guarantee success. Chatzetung and Pai House should strike simultaneously and have the support of the armed forces of the Party Underground. Only through such co-ordination could the greatest number of comrades be saved. In that case, while the plans should be drawn up by the prison Party organization, they had also to be checked and endorsed by the Chungking Party Underground, which would then be able to organize its forces and

make full preparations. Hsu Yun-feng had considered the matter from every angle and knew that a successful break-out from the biggest concentration camps of the Sino-American secret service would be no easy matter. No unnecessary risks, no action that might forewarn the enemy, should be taken. Each step in this plan was fraught with hazards and the least slip would have to be paid for in blood.

Hsu Yun-feng waited eagerly in the darkness for Hua Tze-liang. He had decided to report to the special Party branch all these thoughts which had weighed so long on his mind. He hoped that the comrades here would be able to transmit them to the Chungking Party organization.

The sound of distant footsteps echoed through the tunnel. Hua Tze-liang was coming at last. Hsu Yun-feng forgot the misery of life in the dungeon. He stopped scraping, covered the crack with hay, then sat up. He heard the creaking of several iron doors in the tunnel. A few moments later the light was turned on and Hua Tze-liang showed his bearded face at the hole of the locked door, holding a bowl of food in his hand.

Firecrackers popped and banged, smoke curled upwards in the main street at Tsechikou. A crowd of adults and children stood at the entrance of the new general store which was just opening.

The proprietor was a hefty man wearing black silk trousers and jacket holding a folded paper fan. His swarthy face was flushed and beaming with smiles as he fired orders at his shop assistants and greeted the customers in Szechuanese with a heavy Hupeh accent. He kept nodding and bowing to the throng collected around the door.

"Come in and sit down! Have a look around. . . ."

The new Hsinchi General Store was quite large, and was soon filled with noisy buyers. It carried a large assortment of staple commodities such as oil, salt, sauces, vinegar, cigarettes and wines. The proprietor hurried busily to and fro, frequently pointing to the red and green paper signs, which proclaimed:

Neither Old nor Young Cheated! Quality Goods at Bargain Prices!

A warder from Pai House walked down the street with Hua Tze-liang in tow. They were on their way to buy oil and salt when the hubbub from the Hsinchi General Store attracted their attention.

"Twenty per cent discount! Satisfaction guaranteed or your money refunded!"

Hearing the owner's shouts, the warder glanced at the new shop front, then elbowed his way in. Here was a chance to make some profit for himself.

Hua Tze-liang, balancing two baskets of vegetables on a shoulder-pole, also squeezed in.

"Look out!" someone shouted at him. "Haven't you got a tongue in your head? Why didn't you warn us to get out of the way?"

"You've made my clothes filthy with your muddy baskets!"

"Don't mind him, he's a loony," said the warder.

The proprietor came to greet them with hearty smiles. "Please come and sit over here, sir."

An assistant brought covered bowls of tea and offered the warder cigarettes. "We're only a small firm, but as we've only just opened, we're giving a special twenty per cent discount in the first three days."

"May I ask your name, Mr. Proprietor?" asked the warder, lighting a cigarette.

"Ho Cheng-hsin. I'm a newcomer to these parts, and hope to count you among my customers. Our prices are very reasonable, and we carry everything you might need." The proprietor talked like a much-travelled good-natured merchant who liked to make friends. As he spoke, he glanced at the white-haired old man standing by the warder and took note of the blue triangles on his clothing.

"Please sit down too!"

Hua Tze-liang obediently sat down beside his baskets, hugging his shoulder-pole.

"May I count on your patronage, sir?" The proprietor smiled genially. "At home one relies on one's parents and outside on one's friends. Whenever you have time, come and join me for a cup of tea!"

The warder grinned. "Strangers the first time, friends the second!"

"Ha-ha! How true! How true! Do you intend to make any purchases today, sir?"

"We feed more than a hundred people. I might consider buying here regularly if prices are fair . . . " the warder drew out the last words significantly.

"Of course, of course!" smiled the proprietor. "I've made a new friend on the first day of business, so I'll give you an extra discount over and above the twenty per cent. Assistant! Come and serve the officer."

Jars of oil and salt were soon piled on top of the vegetables in Hua Tze-liang's baskets. The proprietor then took down a carton of cigarettes from the shelves and stuck it in the basket.

"Just a little present. Smoke them at your leisure." Then without the slightest embarrassment he slipped a roll of banknotes into the warder's pocket. "Well, sir, we've hit it off fine. Let's be friends, and my little shop will supply the food for your hundred or so people."

The agent nodded and grinned. "Certainly, certainly."

The proprietor courteously accompanied the agent through the milling crowd of customers to the door and shook hands with him. He also shook hands with Hua Tze-liang and as he did so, a slip of paper passed into Hua Tze-liang's palm.

Hua Tze-liang knew this was a reply from the Party Underground to a letter he had previously delivered. He adjusted the pole over his shoulder and slowly jogged off.

A gleaming blue automobile drove out of the city and sped along the Chengtu-Chungking Highway.

A middle-aged man in a brown suit and gold-rimmed spectacles sat in the car. He was Li Ching-yuan. Deep creases

now marked his forehead and his hair had turned white at the temples, but his near-sighted eyes had still their old cool, resolute look and seemed more penetrating than ever. As he reclined in the seat with an ivory cigarette holder between his teeth, he looked just like a rich business man or a high official.

The car climbed the winding mountain road, passed through a tunnel and then sped downhill again.

As it drove past a large estate the passenger caught glimpses of heavily-armed sentries.

"Chiang Kai-shek is here again," the driver remarked.

Li Ching-yuan did not reply. He shuffled through a pile of letters, his mind still occupied with some matters he had been dealing with before leaving the city.

After receiving Li Ching-yuan's phone call, Cheng Yao had arrived with the things he had asked for. The young girl was now more serious than before. All the same, Li Ching-yuan's first question was:

"You've been six months in an office. Have you settled down to the work yet?"

"It's much lighter than journalism," smiled Cheng Yao. "Nobody is interested in life insurances now. Our Anping Life Insurance Company is hardly doing any business. . . ."

"Have you seen your mother lately?"

Cheng Yao shook her head. A wisp of hair fell over her forehead and she brushed it aside with a quick gesture.

"Since working in the office, I've become more careful about going out." One could see that she meant it.

"You people had a close shave on the day of the big fire,"* remarked Li Ching-yuan.

"Linsen Road was packed with refugees. Children wailing and calling for their fathers and mothers — it was pitiful."

* Kuomintang agents set fire to the business centre of Chungking on September 2, 1949, shortly before the city was liberated. The fire caused ten thousand casualties and rendered more homeless.

Cheng Yao again saw the blaze in the strong wind, the tongues of flame licking at houses, the roofs and walls collapsing and the smoke rolling skywards.

"The fire raged all day and couldn't be put out. They say that the fire-hoses sprayed petrol."

"The enemy is putting the prosperous business areas to the torch," said Li Ching-yuan. "It's part of their plan to destroy Chungking."

"Yes, Chiang Kai-shek even came for an on-the-spot inspection."

"This proves information sent from Pai House is absolutely reliable."

"I've memorized the list of names sent from Pai House and Chatzetung," said Cheng Yao, "I recognized my brother's handwriting as soon as I saw the letter Hua Tze-liang brought out."

"It's the same Sung-style writing he used for *Forward*. By the way, do you know who Hua Tze-liang is?"

Cheng Yao shook her head.

"He's Hua Wei's father."

"What? Is that true?"

Li Ching-yuan thought how much Cheng Yao had changed. He knew she was now on the right road. This girl was like her brother in that she made strict demands upon herself.

The car sped on.

They were nearing craggy mountains covered with forests. At Green Tree Pass, the car slowed down to a halt before a heavily guarded inspection post. Li Ching-yuan gave the driver a permit and the latter handed it through the window to a gendarme. The gendarme glanced at the seal on the special blue pass and returned it with a deferential wave of the hand. He motioned them on.

The car left the highway soon afterwards and turned into a branch road leading to Hot Springs Park.

When they arrived, Li Ching-yuan stepped out of the car and, leaning on his cane, stood aside for several groups of young

students who were hurrying towards the springs and the pavilion in the centre of the lake. Then he sauntered along a mosaic path winding between stately cedars, casually taking in the flowerbeds and charming pavilions. Finally he reached a secluded hotel.

A white-coated waiter came to greet him. Li Ching-yuan told the driver that he would not be needed until after lunch, handed the waiter his hat and cane and stepped into the quiet building.

The driver ordered a cup of tea and sat down near the door to wait. He looked calm and relaxed, but his casual glances missed nothing.

In a room furnished with elegance, Li Ching-yuan met Grandma. She had come from Mount Huaying as instructed.

Li Ching-yuan gave her a detailed account of the directives given by a representative from the Party's South China Bureau including the decision that the underground Party organization in Chungking should at once put the main emphasis of its work on preparation for liberation.

Grandma listened attentively. A little smile played on her face as she took stock of the tasks now facing the guerillas.

"We must act ahead of the enemy and see to it that the industrial city of Chungking remains unharmed," she said. "When the First Field Army and the North China Field Army advance into northern Szechuan, we'll be ready to co-ordinate with them, as the South China Bureau directs us. Furthermore, we're prepared to shift some units from Mount Huaying towards Chungking to help the Second Field Army when the time is ripe."

Li Ching-yuan nodded in agreement. "The South China Bureau has rightly pointed out that rapid advances by the Liberation Army will throw the enemy into confusion. However, the higher authorities maintain that the guerilla forces will have a heavy enough task in northern Szechuan. The number of units you'll be required to shift towards Chungking will be

decided later, after you've worked out how many you can spare."

"The Chungking Underground will have a big job preserving the city, what with the secret American military mission coming, and Chiang Kai-shek taking personal command!"

"We'll do our best to overcome difficulties and fulfil our task," said Li Ching-yuan in a voice full of confidence. A clamour of young people's voices came through the windows from the woods outside, as if promising him their full support. They were students discussing plans for protecting their schools. They could talk as loudly as they liked here, as the enemy was too preoccupied to pay much attention to such distant suburbs.

Grandma smiled understandingly. She poured some hot tea into Li Ching-yuan's cup and listened while he told her that the South China Bureau wanted them to study once more the question of how to rescue the comrades in the concentration camps. The South China Bureau had repeatedly told its representative before he set out for Chungking: "These comrades are long-tested fighters, fine sons and daughters of the Party and the people. Every possible means must be used to rescue these invaluable cadres; and the more saved, the better." After further inquiring into the situation in Chungking, the representative had expressed full approval for the suggestion Hsu Yun-feng had sent out from Pai House, that an outside force should take advantage of the enemy's confusion on the eve of liberation to make a sudden raid on SACO. The representative had also emphasized that the Party Underground and the guerillas should start preparations without the least delay. The South China Bureau intended to get the Second Field Army dispatch an advance unit to guarantee the success of this operation.

Li Ching-yuan paused, looking out the window, and Grandma's eyes followed his. They could see the racing blue waters of the Chialing River emanating from faraway mountain gorges. It flows on through the precipitous Wentang Gorge to still more spectacular gorges further downstream. The sound of

sculls and oars hitting the water could be heard a long way off, and white sails dotted the horizon.

They did not speak for a while. The experienced Li Ching-yuan had the habit of rethinking any important matter, of examining all aspects of a situation before making a decision. He would search for any possible oversight, and even when fully confident of his judgment he would still seek the opinions of other comrades whenever possible. After he had given Grandma the assignment, he naturally asked his old comrade-in-arms what she thought of the plan. She understood him all right. As she carefully turned the instruction of the South China Bureau over in her mind, she could not but recollect her discussions with the comrades in the mountains. When the Bureau was leaving Chungking three years ago, the leading comrades had predicted that they would return in three to five years. Three years had passed now, and the Liberation Army was fighting its way back. The correctness of the Bureau leaders' statement bolstered everyone's confidence. The comrades had said how wonderful it would be if they could actually see the comrades of the Bureau on the day when the Liberation Army units joined forces in victory. But they realized that they must not lose sight of the overall situation. There were so many things yet to be done; how could they expect the Bureau comrades return just now? Others thought there was the possibility of their coming back, and that hoping for this could not be considered losing sight of the overall situation. . . .

Grandma did not say what Li Ching-yuan expected her to. But when she mentioned the discussion among the comrades, he showed great interest. "I think you must have agreed with those other comrades!" he interjected.

"Not only me. They all had this hope!"

Li then told her how a year ago the Central Committee decided to form a contingent of cadres to be stationed along the provincial borders, awaiting orders to enter Szechuan. It was said that many comrades who previously worked in the Communist Party office at Chungking had joined the contingent, and

that Chairman Mao and the Central Committee showed great concern for them. Vice-Chairman Chou En-lai spent many hours listening to reports on the situation in Szechuan and southwest China and discussed with the comrades of the contingent the question of when the Liberation Army should move into Szechuan.

"Did this all take place in northern Shensi?"

"No. Always in mountain gullies and on marches." The usually expressionless face of Li Ching-yuan glowed. "Vice-Chairman Chou was much concerned about the comrades who remained to carry on the struggle here. He often inquired about them individually. Recently he asked a comrade to find out if the woman comrade, meaning you, fighting in Mount Huaying was in good health."

"Aiya! How dare I impose on him! He's always so busy and still remembers everything. Does he have any new instructions?" she asked.

As Li Ching-yuan recalled the tone in which the representative of the South China Bureau transmitted the Vice-Chairman's instructions, his voice became both ardent and confident, and inspired revolutionary optimism. "Vice-Chairman Chou said that we would soon win victory throughout the country. New revolutionary tasks face us. We must unhesitatingly push the socialist revolution forward and carry it through to the end. In a country with hundreds of million of people, it will take decades or even longer years of extremely sharp and complicated struggle to accomplish the revolutionary tasks. Three to five years is a mere beginning. Chairman Mao has compared our revolution to the Long March and this victory today is merely a first step. All comrades must be mentally prepared for prolonged struggle!"

"The Chairman and Vice-Chairman have put it so well," exclaimed Grandma. Though a well seasoned comrade, she was so elated as if she were a new recruit just joining the struggle.

Grandma looked at Li Ching-yuan who was still preoccupied with his thoughts and said: "I'm fit as a fiddle! Give me more

work, I can do it. We haven't even completed the first step in our Long March. We must hurry and catch up!"

"Marching forward under Chairman Mao's banner will enable us to catch up fast and stick to the end!" The incisive and reassuring words of Li Ching-yuan made them quickly shift their attention to the upcoming liberation struggle.

"Has the guide for the advance unit been selected?" asked Grandma with a note of eagerness in her voice.

"Yes, we have someone in mind."

"Who?"

"Chen Sung-lin."

"Why send him? He's busy with the struggle to protect the factories which is at its most critical stage now. I'll recommend somebody else to you."

"Very well." After a fleeting smile Li Ching-yuan's face resumed its usual gravity.

"Hua Wei. He has no particular job right now."

Li Ching-yuan agreed.

"Is it possible to get a rough map?" she asked.

Li Ching-yuan took a small square of folded paper from his pocket and handed it to Grandma. She spread it out. It was a detailed map of the SACO grounds, military routes and symbols marked in blue and red.

Grandma was at once engrossed in it. "Ah, this is Tsechikou, and these are the perimeter defences. Chatzetung — Pai House — Plum Garden halfway up the mountain — right, everything is here. The break-through should take place here, followed by a direct thrust from the back of the mountain."

Under Grandma's experienced eyes, lines and markings turned into mountain-ranges, valleys, woods and lines of attack.

"This map is splendid. We guarantee to fulfil our mission!"

"When the time comes, I'll see that you have a good guide," Li Ching-yuan said significantly.

"You have another inside man besides that warder, haven't you?"

Li Ching-yuan smiled and patted Grandma on the shoulder. "One can't hide anything from you!"

"Are you sure you want to release that valuable comrade to act as our guide?" asked Grandma quizzically.

"It's our duty to see that our imprisoned comrades are brought out safely."

"Good!" Grandma thrust out her hand with finality. "Then it's agreed. We welcome your excellent guide, and will provide a guide for the Liberation Army. I'll tell Hua Wei to set out at once."

"Still as impatient as ever!"

The rustling of the pines in the valley covered the sound of their voices. Grandma thought of all the previous instances when the Party Underground had given her accurate information about the enemy, and she remarked: "Those comrades must be really devoted to work for the Party in the enemy's lair. I suppose they are the ones who sent out the information about the secret American Mission!"

"The first to get it out were not them but the prisoners in the concentration camps. It was sent out through a liaison post."

"They even find ways to send information out from prison. Even there, they continue to work selflessly for the Party. We'd be unworthy of the Party if we failed to rescue such splendid comrades!"

Grandma walked to the window. She was deeply agitated.

Li Ching-yuan took off his spectacles and wiped them, then said slowly: "I have studied the enemy's plans carefully, and I'm worried that they might bring the execution date forward."

"That's quite possible," replied Grandma, gazing at the pines outside the window.

"The first to die would be Hsu Yun-feng, Chiang Hsueh-chin, Cheng Kang . . ." Li Ching-yuan went on. "I know they don't fear death, but the Party hopes to save them. . . ."

Grandma's face became grave. Before coming here, the comrades at Mount Huaying had urged her to find some way of rescuing Sister Chiang.

"It breaks my heart even to hear their names mentioned." Grandma sighed, then suddenly asked: "Sister Chiang and Lao Peng's little boy must be nearly three years old now. Who's caring for him?"

"Cheng Kang's mother. I saw the child last week. He's a fine-looking youngster."

Somewhat comforted, Grandma heaved a deep sigh.

"I keep thinking of the arrested comrades," said Li Ching-yuan. "Their loyalty, courage, steadfastness and astuteness will always act as a spur to us to give our all for communism."

"I feel the same way. . . ."

These two comrades-in-arms fully understood each other. Profound sympathies linked their thoughts and hopes, and gave them greater strength to love and hate.

Li Ching-yuan asked Grandma if she had any other opinions on the rescue plan.

"Your arrangements have my complete approval," she replied without hesitation. "Please inform the comrade from the South China Bureau that we shall fulfil all the tasks entrusted to us. We'll save as many comrades as we possibly can."

"The struggle is reaching its climax, so the South China Bureau has decided that from now on you must use a new code when communicating with higher authorities. It's in my car, and I'll bring it to you in a minute. The next time you come we shall meet in the city, either in the library or the teahouse in the YMCA compound."

Grandma nodded. "Since the date for Chungking's liberation has been brought forward, I'll move some of our units closer to the city at once."

There was something else that Li Ching-yuan wanted to tell Grandma.

"I have good news for you," he began.

Grandma blinked. "Good news?"

"He isn't dead."

"Who do you mean?"

"The man who was the Party secretary at the Mount Hua-ying base fifteen years ago — Hua Tze-liang."

"What?"

"It's true all right."

She believed his words. But she could not help but ask in a low voice: "Is it reliable?"

"Three years ago, the South China Bureau let me see a name list secretly sent out from the prison. Vice-Chairman Chou En-lai instructed the East Szechuan Party Committee to think of a way to establish contact. I remembered that his name was on that list."

"Where is he?"

"At Pai House. The warders often take him with them when they go shopping."

"Tze-liang! So you're alive!" Grandma's voice quivered with happiness. "Fifteen years. . . . How I long to see him just once!" she burst out impulsively. Then she hesitated and ended up slowly: "No, not only once. . . ."

Gazing at her sympathetic comrade, she announced with resolution: "I'll see him, but not before all our comrades are rescued and our Liberation Army victoriously joins forces.

25

THE car passed Mount Kolo, then cruised down the highway towards the Paishihyi Airfield. An hour before, Hsu Peng-fei had received a personal phone call from Mao Jen-feng ordering him to go to the airfield at once to welcome the secret American Mission.

As Hsu Peng-fei sat in the speeding car, he had mixed feelings about the current situation. The Communist Party had recently convened the Political Consultative Conference in Peiping and proclaimed the founding of the Chinese People's Republic. This momentous event had been like an atomic explosion followed by a whole series of chain-reactions. Conditions in the Southwest were deteriorating rapidly: the local authorities were showing a marked tendency to vacillate, and some were covertly preparing to conclude local peace agreements; the Communist Underground was active everywhere in preparation for the liberation and production was dropping in the munitions factories; Chungking's suburbs were very unsettled and all sorts of unexpected disturbances kept cropping up, even in the city proper and the school district. If he could not keep matters under control and public order broke down, he would be the man held responsible. Worse still, it might seriously affect his position and career, and spoil the good impression he had made on the old man, Chiang Kai-shek. A single false move in these troubled times would finish him.

He would not be staying in the Southwest much longer. The military situation was rapidly deteriorating and many important officials were becoming very fidgety. Even Chiang Kai-shek's personal direction in the Southwest could not prevent the general disintegration. But Hsu Peng-fei was not too disturbed

by the present turn of events. In fact, he gave little thought to it; he was more concerned about the future. Sooner or later the mainland would have to be given up. Taiwan would be the most important place from now on. The United States had already stated its position, and declared that it would turn Taiwan into an anti-Communist base for the Far East. As the Americans were particularly interested in "anti-Communist underground activities on the mainland," men in his profession would be riding high. The Southwest was the last stronghold to be relinquished on the mainland. This left him ample time for his preparations. He must lay a good foundation: make plans for guerilla warfare, arrange for agents to work underground, destroy the cities and, most important, liquidate every political prisoner he could. No local cadres, no cities and no factories would be left for the Communists. The more and the bigger the difficulties that confronted the Communists in the Southwest, the greater the credit to him, Hsu Peng-fei. When that time came, he would be the man best informed on Southwestern affairs and best qualified to direct the activities of the agents remaining there. No matter how bloated and top-heavy the Taiwan administration, his place was assured. He would become the mainstay of the Bureau of Confidential Information. That was why the despair and pessimism, displayed by certain highly-placed persons over the collapsing front lines and the general disintegration, evoked no more than sardonic amusement in Hsu Peng-fei. That was also the reason for his anxiety over the maintenance of order, as well as for his close attention to the arrangements for future work in the Southwest and the current job of destruction. This too was why he was dissatisfied with Mao Jen-feng, who was now being referred to as a man lacking in drive and initiative.

The crease between Hsu Peng-fei's brows had become more pronounced within the last weeks. He had not hesitated to take many important decisions and carry out a number of drastic measures on his own initiative. His attitude towards Mao Jen-feng was still deferential on the surface, but in reality

he paid less and less attention to his orders. He assumed that in overstepping authority he would be supported by the Special Adviser, and might also gain the trust and favour of Washington. He believed that when his actions began to show results, even Chiang Kai-shek would recognize his merits.

Hsu Peng-fei had waited expectantly for the American Mission to arrive. He was on excellent terms with the head of the mission, his superior in the early days of SACO. The only fly in the ointment was that Yen Tsui would be coming too. This pock-marked fellow and his assistant, Li Chi-kang, had an American-trained all-purpose secret service unit under their command. They would be bound to get in his way and affect his plans to take all the credit. Maybe he ought to curb his own high-handed ways a little in dealing with Yen Tsui so as to lessen suspicions about his intentions. Yes, he had better appear to be more submissive and obedient in Mao Jen-feng's presence.

The car drove down a slope leading to the airfield. A huge silver plane was parked on the runway. This was the "Sino-America," Chiang's private plane and a gift from the President of the United States. As Hsu Peng-fei admired the streamlined fuselage, it occurred to him that he too should have a plane at his disposal, just in case. . . . He didn't dare imagine what his fate would be, if he were careless enough to fall into the clutches of the Communists!

Presently Hsu Peng-fei heard the hum of an engine. He looked out of the window and saw a plane among the clouds. That must be the American Mission's special plane arriving ahead of schedule. Impatiently, Hsu Peng-fei urged the driver to go faster.

The plane circled low over the airfield, came in to land, and was already on the runway when Hsu Peng-fei's car drove up. He opened the door and stepped out at once, thoughtlessly tossing away the cigarette he had just lit. It lay in the weeds by the roadside, and smoke curled up for a long time before it finally went out.

The first to alight from the plane was the beaming Yen Tsui. He was followed by Li Chi-kang, wearing an American military jacket with a lieutenant-colonel's insignia on his collar. Then came the members of the American-equipped secret service unit. They unloaded case after case of secret weapons, wireless transmitters, time fuses and other material.

"Hello, how are you?" Yen Tsui waved to Hsu Peng-fei. Then the two shook hands, looking at each other with guarded expressions. Yen Tsui, just back from the States, took out a cigar-case and held it out with a flourish to Hsu Peng-fei. He asked endless questions about this and that, as if no friction had ever existed between them.

"Why isn't the director here?" inquired Yen Tsui, looking around.

"You've arrived early," replied Hsu Peng-fei, unpleasantly surprised to find that no Americans were on the plane. "Why hasn't the Mission come?"

"They'll be here in half an hour," said Yen Tsui. "Their plane took off later."

Hsu Peng-fei looked relieved, and showed Yen Tsui to the lounge, where refreshments were awaiting them. Over cups of coffee they talked about international developments.

Hsu Peng-fei asked how big the Mission would be.

Yen Tsui smiled. "The head of the Mission said before setting out from Washington that it would concern itself with making decisions on strategy. The Special Adviser has been appointed its vice-head. The designation 'Advisory Department' will be abolished and all its members transferred to the Mission. To facilitate liaison, I am to take part in its work."

"Splendid!" Hsu Peng-fei smiled faintly. "I hope to have your help in the future!"

"As I've been away for more than a year, I'm right out of touch with the situation in the Southwest." Yen Tsui glanced at Hsu Peng-fei and lowered his voice: "I hear the old man frequently loses his temper over the matter of public order."

"Now that Li Chi-kang's unit is here, we needn't have any

more worries on that score." Hsu Peng-fei smiled, then became more serious: "Has the Mission examined the plans for the Southwest?"

"The head of the Mission has a high regard for your talents!" Yen Tsui said ingratiatingly. "And you'll be collaborating again with your old superior." He laughed.

Hsu Peng-fei laughed too. "When it comes to relations with the Americans, you're one up on me!"

"Not at all, not at all," demurred Yen Tsui. "The Mission has approved all the plans. But. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei's expression did not change, nor did he ask any questions. All the same, he knew there was something significant behind that "but."

Yen Tsui paused. Then he stopped beating around the bush and his manner abruptly became professional.

"The Communists like to say that men are their most percious possession. So all the ones we've got should be. . . ." A slight motion of his hand completed the sentence. "But your plans leave too many loopholes. The Mission demands that particular attention be given to secrecy and thoroughness."

Hsu Peng-fei nodded almost imperceptibly.

"The Mission's suggestion is this. . . ." Yen Tsui moved closer to the other's ear: "Secret executions — by batches, and ahead of schedule."

"The date?"

"The sooner the better."

Hsu Peng-fei said nothing and the brooding look in his eyes contrasted sharply with Yen Tsui's complacency.

The drone of motors grew louder. Yen Tsui glanced out of the window and exclaimed: "They're here. That's their superfortress."

Hsu Peng-fei was still mulling over the Americans' intentions, and trying to grasp their implications. He stood up almost absent-mindedly, and followed Yen Tsui out of the lounge. Two cars, one of them Mao Jen-feng's and the other the Special Adviser's, passed them and stopped beside the

landing strip. Hsu Peng-fei hastened forward and asked casually:

"Did the head of the Mission make any statement in Taiwan on his current visit to China?"

Yen Tsui replied: "He's a curious fellow. Loves to be called a 'Friend of China.' "

Meanwhile, the huge plane with American markings taxied up, its glittering propellers blowing up a final cloud of dust as it came to a halt.

A welcome committee headed by Mao Jen-feng and the Special Adviser, hurried over with bouquets to the unopened door of the plane. Hsu Peng-fei and Yen Tsui joined them. Hsu Peng-fei had now worked out the outlines of a new plan for the execution of political prisoners. He would set it in motion, as soon as the man in the plane gave him the signal to go ahead.

The night sky was pitch black and a thin drizzle was falling. The red and green navigation lights of high-flying transport aircraft could be seen between the clouds.

"Fifty-seven . . . fifty-eight. . . ." Braving the cold night air, the women prisoners stood in the shadow of the cell doorway, their faces uplifted towards the sky, listening intently to the planes.

"There are more at night than in the daytime."

"Yes, and more tonight than last night," someone observed.

Their voices could be heard in the far corner, which was not as dark as the rest of the cell.

"Still sending their loot to Taiwan! Sixty flights tonight. . . . Sister Chiang, why not do your writing tomorrow?"

"It'll be finished in a moment." Sister Chiang raised her head slightly, wetted the point of her bamboo pen with her tongue, and went on writing, leaning on the pillow.

The roar of the aircraft did not affect her usual serenity. She finished the last line, wiped the pen clean, folded the slip of paper, and hid it with the pen under her pallet. She smoothed the hay, folded her change of clothing and placed it

neatly under the pillow. At the top of the pile lay the blue cloth gown and red cardigan she had worn when arrested.

Li Ching-chu sat on her pallet, a thin quilt wrapped around her legs. Her broken leg was sometimes swollen and painful. Her hands moved busily along the edge of the quilt to draw out one by one the fine threads, then attached them to a bamboo peg on the wall and deftly twisted them between her palms.

"Why are you working so late tonight?" asked Sister Chiang.

"The child's cap needs another flower."

Sister Chiang said no more, but took hold of a few threads and helped Li Ching-chu to twist them.

Since getting in touch with the prisoners at Pai House, they had frequently sent suggestions to the Party branch, confidently doing their best for the approaching victory. Sister Chiang had just written down some of their recent thoughts.

"Eight . . . another eight planes!"

The voice from the doorway startled some prisoners who were falling asleep.

"Let's sleep, comrades," said Sister Chiang softly, and once more they settled down for the night.

After a while Sun Ming-hsia whispered into Sister Chiang's ear: "May I ask you something?"

Sister Chiang nodded.

"The Liberation Army is advancing into Szechuan soon, isn't it?"

"What do you think?"

"Me? Sister Chiang, didn't you say once that the enemy's actions often give us information?" replied Sun Ming-hsia. "The enemy is getting frantic and their planes are flying night and day. It must mean that the Liberation Army will soon be in Szechuan!"

"Ming-hsia, it's time for you to sleep now," said Sister Chiang, patting her on the shoulder. The girl reluctantly moved away.

Li Ching-chu laid down the threads, then took Sister Chiang's cold hands into her own and pulled them under her quilt.

"Have you written down all your thoughts?" she asked quietly, gazing into Sister Chiang's face with her expressive eyes.

"Yes, I have. I've been very excited ever since hearing about the Political Consultative Conference in Peking. If only we could get more news!"

Li Ching-chu looked out into the night. "We will," she said confidently.

"We shall destroy the old China and create a new China. . . ." Sister Chiang's voice was vibrant with yearning. "We shall wipe out poverty and backwardness and build a new, prosperous and powerful country. What a magnificent cause! We have a large population, a vast territory, a mighty country and a strong Party! Our revolution shall make ever greater contributions to the world, and to all humanity!"

Li Ching-chu nodded. "How far ahead you are thinking. Yet you're right to do so."

"When that time comes, our load will not be a light one," Sister Chiang continued.

A warder was silhouetted for a moment against the grating. Aroused by the footsteps, Sun Ming-hsia got up and walked to the door. As she hurried back, she said, "Sister Chiang, another message!"

Sister Chiang leaned down to kiss Prison Flower, who was lying beside Li Ching-chu, then straightened up.

Sun Ming-hsia's eyes were fixed on the slip of paper. Some other comrades collected around her, while a few went to the door and the window to keep a look-out, even though the warder on duty that night was one of their own people. Only the women prisoners knew about this warder. He brought messages to them, and never to any other cells. Sun Ming-hsia held Sister Chiang's hand and softly read:

"On October 1st, 1949, Chairman Mao Tsetung, in Peking, proclaimed the founding of the People's Republic of China to the whole world."

"Comrades! Our Republic has been set up!"

There was an excited but suppressed cheer.

"The Chinese people have stood up!"

"Quiet! Let me go on reading!" Sun Ming-hsia's voice sank to a whisper, and all the inmates held their breath.

"The working people of the world rejoice as the new China rises majestically in the East. . . ."

Muted cheers again interrupted Sun Ming-hsia.

"Hurrah!"

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

"Long live the People's Republic of China!"

"Long live the Communist Party of China!"

Sister Chiang gestured to them to be quiet; they must not attract the enemy's notice. Her voice quivering with emotion, she urged Sun Ming-hsia to read on.

"The capital of the People's Republic of China is. . . ."

"It must be Peking!" someone interposed.

"The national flag of the People's Republic of China," Sun Ming-hsia's voice vibrated like a taut string, "is a five-starred red flag, and it is now flying over Tien An Men."

"Ah, a five-starred red flag!"

"Sister Chiang, let's add five stars to our red flag."

Everyone watched Sister Chiang, waiting for her approval.

"Sister Chiang!" Sun Ming-hsia pleaded. "Let me bring out our flag."

"I have needle and thread here," said Li Ching-chu in support.

The message from the Party Underground passed from hand to hand. Those who read it turned towards the far corner of the cell. The precious flag was brought out, its brilliant red dazzling the prisoners' eyes. This red flag had been left to them by the unknown comrade, Prison Flower's mother. She had hidden the bullet-riddled, bloodstained flag in an old cotton quilt, and death had overtaken her before she could pass it on to the comrades. It was only much later that they had found it among her possessions.

Many hands holding needles and thread reached for it.

"Where should the stars be?"

"One should be right in the centre, shedding its light all around. That symbolizes the Party. Put one of the four smaller ones in each corner to light up and liberate the whole of our country!"

"Right, we'll do it that way."

The prisoners did not know the correct design for the flag, but their suggestions expressed their burning love for their motherland. Someone made the first stitch, then many nimble fingers swiftly set to work. The gleaming golden stars took shape, each stitch an expression of their loyalty, their triumphant joy.

Sister Chiang leaned against Li Ching-chu, watching her busy comrades. She understood and shared their excitement, but her own joy had sober overtones. Probably Li Ching-chu was the only one who could understand her mixed feelings at this moment. Sister Chiang was aware not only of victory, but also of the final struggle that was about to be waged in this concentration camp. The prison-break and the enemy's massacres would exact a heavy toll of their lives! Maybe she would be the first to pay the price. She was willing to die, if that would save other comrades and preserve them for the Party. She did not give voice to her thoughts as she watched the happy faces around the five-starred red flag. Silently, she went on twisting the threads.

Presently Sun Ming-hsia came to her, holding the folded flag. "The comrades want you to announce the coming of victory," she said. "They also want you to unfold this flag which symbolizes dawn and liberation."

"Me?" Sister Chiang smiled in delighted surprise.

"Yes, you," earnest, eager voices replied.

"It must be you," said Li Ching-chu when the others had quieted down. "You can't disappoint them. Their request is a mark of their trust and respect."

"Very well," said Sister Chiang taking the flag with both

hands and shaking out its folds. It rippled in the air, the five golden stars leaping and dancing. Sister Chiang raised it high and announced in a voice ringing with passion: "May the five-starred red flag be raised over this prison! Let it fly over every inch of our soil!"

The inmates stood gazing at the flag; and the sight of it seemed to carry them far away from the prison cell. They felt that the dawn was at hand, and the long dark night was over; they felt that their chains were smashed and that they stood proud and free on the soil of their own country.

Sister Chiang turned to Li Ching-chu and saw that she had picked up Prison Flower. The child woke up and stared with rounded eyes at her jubilant aunties. Sister Chiang was overwhelmed with love for this child, and impulsively she held the red flag towards Prison Flower. All eyes watched the two of them.

Sister Chiang took the baby in her arms and poured into the tiny ear all the yearnings and ideals that she herself might not live to see realized.

"Child, my beloved child, do you see this flag? It was left by your mother and father. . . ."

Sister Chiang kissed Prison Flower's face many times and gazed with compassion into her bright eyes. It seemed as if the child almost understood what she was saying.

"Child, grow up quickly! Your uncles and aunties will go into battle under this red flag. Later, they will entrust it to you. Remember, child, when you grow up and pass it on to your children, you must be able to declare with a clear conscience that you have lived, fought and given your all to defend this red flag."

A tear glistened in Sister Chiang's eyes as the child's tiny hand reached for the flag. "Child, child, did you understand? How I wish you could give us an answer!" She pressed Prison Flower to her cheek and murmured:

"No matter how violent the storm and how tempestuous the waves, hold aloft this banner for communism!"

Li Ching-chu put Prison Flower down, whispering tenderly: "Child, did you hear what auntie said?"

Bong-bong-bong . . . !

A rapid drumming of the clappers broke the silence of the dawn at the concentration camp and echoed among the mist-shrouded valleys and mountains.

Bong-bong-bong! Bong-bong-bong!

Horns blaring, several cars roared up the road, their wheels crushing every prisoner's heart.

"Are they coming for someone?" an anxious voice asked.

Heavy boots clattered on the concrete path leading towards the women's cell. A voice shouted roughly:

"Open up! Open up!"

The warder held the keys in his hands, but in his nervous haste he pushed at the door. Sun Ming-hsia walked to the door and said disdainfully:

"What are you pushing for? Haven't you got the key?"

The agent started, then quickly unlocked the door. Poking his head in, he yelled:

"Chiang Hsueh-chin! Li Ching-chu! Get your things together at once. You're being transferred!"

"Transferred?" Sun Ming-hsia asked. "Where to?"

"Pai House," said the agent, evasively.

Sun Ming-hsia was surprised. Pai House? It couldn't be. She walked a few steps away from the door, then turned around and said sharply to the warder: "Don't come in! They have to get dressed."

Sister Chiang understood what the order meant. She was perfectly calm and showed neither agitation, fear, nor sorrow. The first glimmer of the dawn was already in sight. So many people had longed for this moment. Hope and happiness infused her whole being. She stood up, went to the shelf on the wall, picked up her comb, and drew it slowly through her hair before a broken mirror. She was smiling. Seeing Sister Chiang so composed, Sun Ming-hsia could not help asking:

"Sister Chiang, do you really think you are being transferred?"

Sister Chiang nodded, but said nothing. She did not want to distress her young comrade sooner than necessary.

Sun Ming-hsia was unconvinced and tried to probe her: "He said Pai House. . . . Give our greetings to the comrades there."

Sister Chiang nodded and said nothing.

Sun Ming-hsia's mind was still uncertain. "If you see Sze-yang. . . ."

"Yes, I know," replied Sister Chiang, combing her hair. She sounded quite unperturbed, and each word was clear and distinct.

Sun Ming-hsia was worried. She did not believe that her comrade was being taken to Pai House. She gazed sadly at Sister Chiang, wondering if she could do anything to help her.

Sister Chiang looked at her with a smile, and hoping to soothe her, asked the very ordinary question: "Does my hair look right?"

Sun Ming-hsia looked at Sister Chiang's hair for a long time. There was so much she wanted to say, but the only words which passed her lips were:

"Yes, it does. Not a hair out of place. . . ."

"They're taking people from the men's cells too," said a grief-stricken voice.

Sister Chiang put down her comb and asked Sun Ming-hsia to fetch her blue gown from under the pillow.

"Won't you be cold in that?" Sun Ming-hsia asked in surprise. Sister Chiang was wearing cotton-padded clothes, and would surely catch cold if she took them off!

"Never mind!" said Sister Chiang, putting it on and placing the red cardigan over her shoulders. From force of habit she smoothed her dress, while saying:

"Ming-hsia, help me straighten my clothes."

Sister Chiang had always liked to look tidy, and she had not lost this habit in the concentration camp. That was one of the reasons why she always gave an impression of vitality

By Wu Fan

and dignity. She was unusually particular and deliberate this morning. Sun Ming-hsia sensed a certain solemnity about her. Was it the solemnity of a revolutionary preparing for the supreme sacrifice? Tears coursed down Sun Ming-hsia's cheeks, as she knelt at Sister Chiang's feet, gently smoothing the wrinkles from her gown. Sister Chiang appeared not to notice her sorrow. She flicked the dust from her shoes, and Sun Ming-hsia put her belongings together. After another quick glance in the mirror, Sister Chiang took a few slow steps forward, almost as if she were rehearsing for a festive occasion or a grand ceremony. She stepped over to Prison Flower and looked at the sleeping child for a long moment. She bent down and kissed her cheek.

Sun Ming-hsia, who had now tied her belongings into a bundle, said, "Sister Chiang, here is a change of clean clothing."

Sister Chiang took the bundle, looked at it for a moment, and handed it back. "I won't need it," she said with a fleeting smile.

The bundle dropped from Sun Ming-hsia's hands and rolled on the floor. Sobbing loudly, she fell into Sister Chiang's arms.

"Sister Chiang. Sister Chiang."

Sun Ming-hsia had never experienced such violent and conflicting emotions. Joy over victory and grief at parting filled her heart to bursting.

"Sister Chiang! How I wish I could go in your place. . . . You mustn't leave us! You mustn't!"

"Calm yourself, Ming-hsia. You must hold out until final victory. Even if you are the only one left, you must hold out!"

After a while she added softly: "If it is necessary to die for our ideal of communism, every one of us should do so without flinching, without our hearts beating any faster."

Sun Ming-hsia raised her tear-stained face to Sister Chiang. Footsteps sounded in the men's building. About ten of their comrades marched along the corridor. On their way they shouted slogans and gripped the hands stretched out to them

from every cell. Now that their executions had been put forward, there was no chance of a prison-break for them. They were to be the first victims of the mass slaughter planned by the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries.

Seeing so many close fellow fighters passing the window, one of the younger girls could no longer restrain her grief. She threw herself on her pallet, weeping aloud.

"Don't send us off with tears. . . ." Sister Chiang gently removed Sun Ming-hsia's hands from her shoulders, and raised the weeping girl so that she could see the glances of farewell from the passing men.

"How brave these comrades are!" Sister Chiang said, as much to herself as to the others. "Neither massacres nor any other blows from the American and Chiang Kai-shek reactionaries in their death agonies can obstruct the advance of the Chinese proletariat. Final victory belongs to us, to our Party!"

Li Ching-chu nodded with heartfelt agreement. She then gave another comrade the slip of paper Sister Chiang had written the previous night and whispered: "Send this to Cell 7."

Li Ching-chu bent over and kissed the sleeping Prison Flower; then, holding her head high and dragging her bad leg, she walked to the door with Sister Chiang. Once more they turned to look at the familiar cell, the little wooden table, the row of clean bowls and chopsticks, the broken mirror on the wall, and the tense faces of their cell mates. "Goodbye, comrades!"

"Sister Chiang! Li Ching-chu!"

Prison Flower was woken up by the voices and footsteps, and she started to cry. Sister Chiang, who was on the point of leaving, stopped and gazed tenderly at the crying child. The weeping Sun Ming-hsia picked her up and held her towards Sister Chiang. The child stretched out her arms and Sister Chiang pressed her cheek against her rosy little face. Prison Flower grasped Sister Chiang's hair and would not let go. "Auntie . . . auntie . . . don't go. . . ."

"Auntie will be coming back," Sister Chiang smiled and

once more kissed the child. "She'll give you a big hug when she comes back!"

Setting down the child and bidding a last farewell to her comrades, Sister Chiang stepped out of the door.

Li Ching-chu was waiting in the corridor. A secret agent handed her a cane, and flush of anger rose in her pale anaemic face. "I can walk by myself," she snapped, flinging aside the cane.

Sister Chiang supported her limping comrade. The two of them walked down the corridor. They did not look back.

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TING Chang-fa looked at Elder Brother, who was standing motionless at the barred window. Clenching his teeth, he walked to the door to look out at the gleaming machine-guns and electrified fences on top of the high wall. His mind was in a turmoil. He had considerable experience in prison-breaks; he had been sentenced to death before, and escaped on the eve of the execution. The situation today, however, was fraught with far greater difficulties than any previous time. The deaths of Sister Chiang, Li Ching-chu and the other comrades had seriously affected their plan. The warders might open fire at any moment, pinning down the prisoners within their cells. High walls, electrified fences and guard towers blocked all escape routes, and defence cordons several miles deep surrounded the concentration camp. A road network enabled secret agents to reach any spot within a few minutes of an alarm being given. There was only one way to frustrate the enemy's scheme to massacre the prisoners, and that was by striking simultaneously with the Liberation Army and the Party Underground when the enemy was panic-stricken on the eve of liberation. But the secret agents had already begun the executions before they were ready to break out.

To minimize our losses during the break-out, he reflected, the guerillas had to smash the border defences of SACO. This should be a surprise attack, and should not be made too close to the concentration camp, or the guerillas would be encircled by the secret agents.

His reflections were interrupted by the sight of a figure flitting past the entrance of the building. Ting Chang-fa immediately stepped away from the door and went to sit on

his pallet, where he kept a look-out for any movement outside the cell.

"One of the women comrades is out there," whispered Yu Hsin-chiang.

It was Sun Ming-hsia, who was taking advantage of exercise time to hang her clothes on the railing to dry. She winked significantly.

"Did you see that?" Ching Yi-ching said under his breath. "She touched the pocket of the jacket on the far left."

Yu Hsin-chiang nodded. "A message from the women. Keep your eyes skinned."

But the padlock on their door had been snapped shut, so they could not lay hands on the secret message for the time being. They would have to wait until exercise time came around again before attempting to get it. Ting Chang-fa was angry. The women prisoners had behaved like sheep without a leader, since the loss of Sister Chiang and Li Ching-chu. Why were they still delivering messages the old way? They knew that the secret agents were more suspicious than ever of everything and everybody. Brusquely, he snapped the stem of his pipe between his teeth. His attention was suddenly arrested by something on the wall.

The prisoners had driven rows of bamboo pegs into the walls to hang up their clothes and other belongings. It was an old practice, and the enemy had never suspected that two of these pegs, one on each wall, could be removed and that the holes went right through to the next cell. The peg which covered the opening leading to Cell 6 was hovering, making the clothes hanging from it move.

"Yu Hsin-chiang," Ting Chang-fa whispered, "there's a message from Cell 6."

Yu Hsin-chiang went to the corner, took down the clothes, then standing on tiptoe pulled out the peg. A wad of paper fell out. Yu Hsin-chiang caught it and spread it open.

"Cell 6 says. . . ."

"The Gorilla is coming!" warned Ching Yi-ching.

Yu Hsin-chiang quickly thrust the peg back and replaced the clothes. The warden's footsteps were now quite near. They stopped outside the door and the Gorilla sneered: "Humph, who's drying clothes? Why should they be hung exactly in front of Cell 7 and nowhere else? Eh? Search every article!"

Yu Hsin-chiang's heart tightened. He quickly put the slip of paper in his mouth and gulped it down.

"Yes, sir," replied the warder on duty, who had followed the Gorilla upstairs. He began to examine the laundry Sun Ming-hsia had just put on the railing. Ching Yi-ching turned pale. Ting Chang-fa looked at him but remained silent. If the enemy discovered any message and got hold of any suggestions from the women comrades about the prison-break, the consequences would be unthinkable. Yu Hsin-chiang's fists were clenched and the eyes of all the prisoners were anxiously directed towards the door. Only Elder Brother showed no reaction; he had left the window and, like most of the prisoners, was lying on his pallet.

Danger was getting nearer and nearer. The warder was now stretching his hand towards the jacket on the far left.

Yu Hsin-chiang whispered something to Ting Chang-fa, and stood up. Ting Chang-fa caught his arm and whispered: "Wait!"

The search proceeded. Every article of clothing came in for close inspection. Presently they heard the warder report in a loud voice:

"Sir! I haven't found anything!"

The prisoners breathed a sigh of relief.

"Nothing?"

It was obvious from the Gorilla's tone that he was not satisfied with the result of the search.

"Look again."

The Gorilla's head showed at the door-hole of Cell 7. "Open the door!" he barked.

"Yes, sir."

The padlock was removed and the Gorilla came in, shouting orders. The warder began to ransack the cell.

The Gorilla walked around, peering first into one face and then into another. "Just what are you up to? Eh? Let me tell you, the Communists haven't taken SACO over yet," he jeered. Then he bawled into the corridor: "Come here! I want Cell 7 thoroughly searched!"

A number of warders immediately appeared.

The Gorilla's roving eyes noticed the clothes hanging on the wall. He stepped forward and pulled some of them from their pegs.

"Those are mine!" cried Little Ning in alarm, and was about to rush forward and protect the secret opening, when Yu Hsin-chiang grabbed hold of him and gave him a restraining look.

The Gorilla turned at the sound, glared at the defiant Yu Hsin-chiang. He walked slowly and deliberately up to Yu, who held his ground. Their eyes met. The Gorilla raised his hand and pointed at Yu Hsin-chiang.

"Search him!"

The warder on duty first ran his hands over him, and then under the Gorilla's careful scrutiny, he unbuttoned Yu Hsin-chiang's jacket, turned every pocket inside out, examined his collar and his cuffs, the waist-band of his trousers, and every other possible hiding place. Finally, he turned around, stood to attention and reported: "There's nothing on him, sir."

The Gorilla stood undecided, loath to see the search end fruitlessly. Seeing there was nothing else he could do, he finally told the warders to go. As he stepped out, he glanced at the big lock hanging from the door and shouted:

"From now on all exercise time is cancelled. Anyone who dares to resist or tries to escape will be shot!" He patted the gun at his belt.

"We will shoot at the first indication of mutinous behaviour!"

The warders echoed:

"Yes, sir, at once."

Yu Hsin-chiang glared at the secret agents, and did not move

from the door until the Gorilla had gone downstairs, and walked out of the prison gate. The prisoners' clothing had been thrown all around the room, but no one was in the mood to pick it up.

Yu Hsin-chiang thrust his hands into his pocket as he went over to speak to Ting Chang-fa. Suddenly he stopped in his tracks — his fingers had touched something. He slowly withdrew his hand, in it was a little ball of paper. How had it got there? The warder had searched that pocket. Yu Hsin-chiang smoothed out the ball of paper.

"It's in Sister Chiang's handwriting!" he exclaimed.

Ting Chang-fa took the slip and read it. Suddenly realizing what had happened, he asked: "That warder who searched you, wasn't he the same one who searched the laundry?"

"Oh!" Understanding lit up Yu Hsin-chiang's face. If it had not been for that quick-witted "warder" there was no telling what might have happened today. They did not know this comrade because up to now he had always delivered messages from the Party Underground to the women's cell.

Ting Chang-fa handed the note to Elder Brother, and after a whispered consultation he beckoned to Yu Hsin-chiang. The three huddled together behind the protecting backs of their cell mates.

"The women comrades knew that the warder on duty was one of us," said Elder Brother, "and their eagerness to send this message is understandable. Nevertheless, such recklessness must not continue." Elder Brother unfolded Sister Chiang's note. "We must study carefully this last message from Sister Chiang. She suggests that we strengthen our links with Pai House and bring forward the date of our break-out."

Elder Brother looked towards the window. It was clear that many thoughts were going through his mind. In measured tones he told his intent listeners:

"For the sake of the Party and the proletariat, we are willing to sacrifice everything, even our lives. But Sister Chiang was right: to do this, we must be better prepared ideologically."

Ting Chang-fa and Yu Hsin-chiang nodded. There was tremor in Elder Brother's voice as he continued:

"Every one of us realizes that the hope of victory and the possibility of death are before us. We have a duty, and that duty is to preserve as many cadres as possible for the Party. For this reason alone, it is natural that we should grieve over the death of a close and beloved comrade. But we cannot allow ourselves to be carried away by our feelings. In our grief, we must not forget the task the Party has entrusted to us."

"Sister Chiang dedicated herself to the proletariat," said Ting Chang-fa. "She is an example to us all."

"We should be like Sister Chiang, and always work for the Party," said Elder Brother. "Tell all the cells tonight to study Sister Chiang's last message. Let everyone gain strength and courage from her noble and unyielding spirit." Elder Brother placed Sister Chiang's note before Ting Chang-fa and Yu Hsin-chiang, then, placing his hands on their shoulders, he said with emotion: "We should remember Sister Chiang's words: 'Never quail before danger, always advance, and meet all trials without flinching, without our hearts beating any faster!' "

These words echoed long in their hearts.

Elder Brother then told them of his decision.

"All the cells should check up on their preparations. We must strike before the enemy does."

Yu Hsin-chiang asked: "When do we start and how should we co-ordinate with Pai House?"

Elder Brother replied without hesitation: "Everything hinges on the Party Underground being told early enough about the timing of our attempt." After a slight pause, he added:

"Tell the 'warder' to take the utmost care. Nothing must go wrong at this stage!"

No sooner had the phone at Pai House started ringing than the receiver was snatched up by a waiting hand.

Two hours previously, Lu Ching had received an urgent summons from Hsu Peng-fei, and had hurried off to town to report

on the preparations. An anxious Yang Chin-hsing had been keeping vigil by the telephone ever since. The call from Lu Ching had come, it was half an hour later than the time set by Hsu Peng-fei.

"Is that Yang Chin-hsing?" asked Lu Ching.

"Speaking. Are you coming back now, warden?"

"No. I'll be waiting for you there." Lowering his voice, he uttered the code sentence previously agreed upon: "Ask Mr. Huang to come for a talk."

Yang Chin-hsing put down the receiver, whispered some orders to one of the warders, and went to General Huang's cell with him.

Walking in, Yang Chin-hsing nodded a greeting. "We've just had a phone call from the Second Department. Mr. Hsu asks you to go to Plum Garden for a talk."

"What about?" countered General Huang.

"He wants to talk about something," repeated Yang Chin-hsing, and added with emphasis. "You're to go at once."

Glancing at the ruffian, General Huang hesitated a moment, then walked to his bed and picked up his military cap. While the agent was not looking, he took something from under the mattress and slipped it into his pocket. After one last look around the little cell where he had lived for all these years, the general stepped out of the door.

There were no extra guards outside and he was not handcuffed. This seemed to imply that there was nothing shady about this invitation to Plum Garden.

General Huang looked back several times as the concentration camp receded in the distance. Acting on an impulse, he took off his cap and waved it in farewell, though he could no longer see the Communists with whom he had shared so many years of prison life.

It was a muggy, oppressive day. Heavy clouds were low over the mountains, portending a storm. Weak sunlight edged the clouds and shone on the sombre pine forests.

General Huang marched with a firm stride along a narrow

stone-flagged path which skirted the mountain and led to Plum Garden. From the corner of his eye he coldly observed the secret agents, now walking close beside him, now following at his heels. Complete silence enveloped the mountain slopes; there was no sign of human life, nor even the twittering of birds. Only the hollow tread of their boots broke the silence.

The little path wound and twisted until it came to a brook. On the opposite hillside was a building partly hidden among the trees. This was Plum Garden, the notorious den of the American agents. General Huang stepped onto the rickety little bridge. As it had been neglected for many years its timbers were rotten, so he had to keep his eyes down and step carefully to avoid decaying planks.

"Careful, Mr. Huang, the bridge is in a bad state!"

General Huang ignored the agent. He had reached the far end of the bridge when he heard two muffled gunshots behind him, followed by two more.

The reports could hardly be heard above the rustling of the surrounding trees and the rush of the water. General Huang lurched forward, took two unsteady steps, then with an effort recovered his balance. Glaring furiously, he turned around. The blood welling from his chest dripped onto the stone flags and trickled slowly into the reddening brook.

The general raised a hand and pointing it at his breast shouted the hoarse, angry command: "Give me another."

The pistol with a silencer coughed twice.

Writhing in a pool of blood, General Huang managed to put his hand into his pocket, but had not the strength to take it out again. Ever since he had heard of the murder of General Yang Hu-cheng and Little Turnip's whole family he had carried around a weapon the Communists had given him, prepared to use it against the enemy when the time came. He knew what his fate would be. The wily Yang Chin-hsing, however, had taken him unawares and shot him in the back.

By sheer will-power, General Huang raised his head. As the blood gushed from his mouth, he shouted with all his fast fading

strength: "Down with the Kuomintang fascists . . . !" He fell back into the pool of blood.

Yang Chin-hsing rolled the body over with his foot. Still holding the smoking pistol, he picked up General Huang's cap, flicked off the dust and put it on his own head all askew. Then he lifted General Huang's insensible arm and took off the gold watch. He put it to his ear to check that it was still working, shoved his pistol into his belt, and fastened the blood-stained watch on his own wrist. He then turned to his assistant with a bestial snarl.

"Why didn't you finish him off when you saw him turning around? Fathead!"

Lu Ching, holding a camera, came out from the grove of bamboos where he had been stealthily observing the proceedings. According to secret service regulations, every victim had to be photographed and the pictures sent to Taiwan — or to Chiang Kai-shek personally if the victim was an important one.

The murderers shifted General Huang's body into a better position for photographing. It was already turning cold.

Yang Chin-hsing roughly jerked General Huang's stiff right hand out of his pocket. He recoiled in spite of himself, and a cold sweat broke out on his forehead. The dying general had been clutching the hilt of a sharp, gleaming dagger — the dagger he had not been able to plunge into the heart of his murderer.

The white-haired Hua Tze-liang jogged along behind a warder on the road to Pai House. Two big baskets of coal swung from his shoulder-pole. Besides going to Tsechikou for vegetables, he had to go once or twice a day to get coal from the SACO mine — a colliery for the private use of the secret agents — which was on the road between Chatzetung and Pai House. Sometimes, the warder was too lazy to walk the whole way and would wait on a hilltop while Hua Tze-liang went for the coal by himself. Whether the warder was watching him or not, however, Hua Tze-liang came and went without even letting his eyes wander, much less doing anything against

regulations, so that he seemed almost like a caged bird that had become accustomed to captivity. As time passed, the warders were so confident that he would do as he was told, that they often let him go by himself. They would even go off to gamble or drink during the shopping trips to Tsechikou and Hua Tze-liang would return alone to Pai House with the vegetables. But things had tightened up recently and the warder now followed him around so that he had less freedom.

It was cold and cloudy, and the north wind was whistling down from the mountain peaks. Hua Tze-liang staggered under the weight of the coal and his breath came in gasps. He opened his jacket, baring a body so thin that one could count every rib. Beads of sweat rolled down the brown, wrinkled chest.

The agent and Hua Tze-liang kept going until they reached the crest of a wooded slope. The agent sat down on a rock near the crossroads and told him to take a rest.

Hua Tze-liang obediently set down his baskets and sat on a stone. He took off his tattered cap to fan himself, while the agent took out a cigarette and began to smoke. As usual, neither of them spoke.

Hua Tze-liang was worried about a new and serious development and his mind was very busy. The "warder" from Chatzetung whom he had been meeting the last few months, had again failed to accompany the coal-transporting detail. Before Hua Tze-liang had been the cook at Pai House, liaison between Chatzetung and the Party Underground had depended on the "warder" whom the Party had placed at the concentration camp for that purpose. As Hua Tze-liang was now cook it was more convenient for him to get in and out of SACO territory than for the "warder" who could only leave on his days off, so Hua Tze-liang had taken over his function after the setting up of the Tsechikou liaison post. He was also able to meet the "warder" at the coal mine and pass on information and messages. Yesterday, however, a new man had come in his place, and Hua Tze-liang was very much disturbed about this change. Time was short and it would be disastrous if contact with

Chatzetung was broken off now. The "warder" had always been very careful and it was hardly possible that he had been caught by the enemy. Most likely he had been transferred during the recent replacement of the guard — one of the enemy's latest precautions. Nevertheless, this meant that Hua Tze-liang was now unable to pass on the daggers intended for the prisoners at Chatzetung, and that all contact was severed. More serious still, it had been agreed that the Chatzetung Party organization was to set the time for the prison-break, and there was no means now of obtaining this vitally important information.

A large number of men came walking down the road with shovels and picks on their shoulders. Hua Tze-liang recognized them as part of a SACO special guard detachment. As they were passing the crossroads in the direction of the pine-covered mountain, their leader noticed the blue triangles on Hua Tze-liang's clothes, and asked in surprise:

"What's this prisoner doing out here?"

The smoking warder replied:

"He's just a loony."

The other remarked:

"Uhuh.... Look at all those cars over there. Another conference at Plum Garden?"

The warder nodded and asked:

"Where are you going?"

"Tai Li's Shrine. Emergency job."

The guard detachment was gradually lost to sight among the trees. Two muffled gunshots rang out from a nearby hollow, followed by two more. The warder stared in the direction of the sound, then shouted at Hua Tze-liang:

"Get going! Quick!"

Back at Pai House, Hua Tze-liang had only just set down his baskets when he was summoned by head-warder Yang Chin-hsing.

"D'you know why I let you be cook?"

No answer. Hua Tze-liang stood like a block of wood.

Admiring the gold watch on his wrist, Yang Chin-hsing asked again:

"Do you know that the Communists are coming?"

Hua Tze-liang's face remained blank.

"It won't do you any good when they come." And pointing at himself: "I'll be commander of a guerilla unit. We're going to fight in the mountains. Get it? You're coming with me!"

Seeing that Hua Tze-liang had nothing to say, Yang Chin-hsing suddenly yelled: "Stop acting crazy! If you try to put anything over on me, I'll have you shot!"

Hua Tze-liang stood as motionless as a statue.

"There are hundreds of thousands of troops in our guerilla training headquarters. We're not afraid of the Communists!" boasted Yang Chin-hsing. "I appoint you supply officer of the Anti-Communist National Salvation Army. You're going with me. Get that?"

"Me? An officer?" It didn't seem to penetrate Hua Tze-liang's brain, and after a while he pottered back to the kitchen and began cooking as usual. It was evening by the time he returned to his cell.

That night, after the other inmates had dropped off to sleep, Hua Tze-liang's neighbour, Chi Hsiao-hsuan, lay awake. Many thoughts were troubling his mind.

After liberating Kweiyang, units of the People's Liberation Army advancing into the Southwest had already entered Szechuan, one column advancing on Chengtu from northern Szechuan, and another bearing down on Chungking from the east. The Second Field Army in eastern Szechuan had already crossed the White Horse Mountains and was pushing forward rapidly, so that Chungking would be liberated much earlier than originally expected. This was the best of news, yet it made Chi Hsiao-hsuan all the more cautious. There must be no trusting to luck; the least oversight would have to be heavily paid for in lives. Cool strategist that he was, Chi Hsiao-hsuan did not let himself become excited or overhasty on the eve of the coming struggle. On the contrary, he carefully reviewed the

situation as a whole, and, like a good chess-player, considered how each step would affect the whole game, be it only the shifting of a single pawn. But things were developing rapidly. There were, for instance, the consecutive killings of Yang Hu-cheng and his family, Little Turnip's whole family and of General Huang from upstairs. The nine-year-old Little Turnip had been brought back from the prison in Kweichow where he had been sent a few months previously and on the very night of his return to SACO, he had been brutally murdered. Just recently Chi Hsiao-hsuan had learned of the death of Chiang Hsueh-chin and other comrades at Chatzetung. Deaths were to be expected, but that did not lessen the pain and grief they caused him.

Hua Tze-liang touched Chi Hsiao-hsuan on the shoulder. As usual, he had waited until late at night before telling Chi Hsiao-hsuan about the latest developments. Chi Hsiao-hsuan rolled over and listened as his comrade whispered. A long minute passed, then he remarked:

"So the 'warder' from Chatzetung didn't show up again today."

"No."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan was deeply troubled by this news. How could Pai House, Chatzetung and the Party Underground keep themselves informed of each other's plans and co-ordinate their efforts if they lost contact?

After a while Hua Tze-liang told him about something else that worried him.

"The agents discovered a dagger on General Huang's body. That's the one we gave him. The enemy is investigating. . . ."

A flashlight beam stabbed into the cell, swept over the sleeping prisoners and rested on Chi Hsiao-hsuan's face.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan and Hua Tze-liang lay motionless. They seemed to be so sound asleep that not even a light shining into their eyes could wake them.

Some time later, soft-soled shoes padded up the staircase.

It was Yang Chin-hsing on a surprise night inspection. They heard him go upstairs.

"The enemy isn't sleeping either," Hua Tze-liang whispered with a dry chuckle.

"The American-operated Guerilla Training Headquarters has already given marching orders to some units of secret agents. Today Yang Chin-hsing. . . ."

Hua Tze-liang passed on to Chi Hsiao-hsuan what the secret agent had revealed.

The expression on Chi Hsiao-hsuan's face could not be seen in the darkness.

Dogs barked in the distance, and a pale light came through the window. Another day was dawning.

"The digging of burial pits is being speeded up," Hua Tze-liang told his comrade. "More agents have been put to work on them. The enemy has decided to throw Hsu Yun-feng into the acid pool."

"When?"

Hua Tze-liang shook his head. "I don't know."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan moved closer to Hua Tze-liang's ear. "When you take him his food, tell him to escape during the night."

"He doesn't want to go," replied Hua Tze-liang. "He says the tunnel he's dug isn't for himself, but for the comrades."

Chi Hsiao-hsuan was silent. He could understand Hsu Yun-feng's determination to sacrifice himself for the collective. But time was short. The enemy was trying to find out where General Huang's dagger had come from and was forcing Hua Tze-liang to go with them into the mountains. There was also the danger that contact between Pai House and the Party Underground would be cut off at any moment. After a few minutes' reflection, Chi Hsiao-hsuan whispered cautiously into Hua Tze-liang's ear: "I've thought of something else. How about your going out to act as guide for the armed forces of the Party Underground . . . ?"

At daybreak, Hua Tze-liang went to the kitchen as usual. He made the fire, boiled the water and was just going to pour in

the rice, when Yang Chin-hsing unexpectedly walked into the kitchen.

"Add rice for a few more people," he rapped out. "New warders are coming!"

After the prisoners had eaten their breakfast, Hua Tze-liang collected the bowls and chopsticks, washed the cooking pots, and picked up his baskets to go shopping at Tsechikou with the warder as on any other day. If he could inform the liaison post about the date and hour of the prison break-out, his liaison task would be completed. He decided to act on Chi Hsiao-hsuan's suggestion, and be on the alert for an opportunity to slip away from the warder and make his report directly to the Party Underground. After that, he would serve as a guide to the armed forces of the Underground when they made their raid on SACO to help the prisoners at Chatzetung and Pai House escape.

Just as Hua Tze-liang was about to step out of the kitchen, Yang Chin-hsing and one of the new warders strode briskly through the yard.

"Hua Tze-liang, come out!"

Hua Tze-liang set down his shoulder-pole and walked slowly out of the kitchen. Patting the coal dust from his clothes, he watched the warder who at once took over his duties.

"You're not needed any more for cooking and shopping. That's the warden's order!" Yang Chin-hsing barked.

This was a bolt from the blue.

A few minutes later, he was pushed into one of a dozen lorries filled with armed agents from SACO's Guerilla Training Headquarters. Leaving SACO grounds, they roared down the Chengtu-Chungking Highway and were soon swallowed up in a cloud of dust.

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LI Ching-yuan walked slowly down the street in the sunset, making his way towards Linsen Road. For the past two days he had been too busy to go to the Anping Life Insurance Company.

With the swift approach of victory preparations had been speeded up. The Municipal Committee had today formally approved the watchword "Greet the Liberation!" This was both the long-awaited victory signal and a militant slogan to inspire the masses. Much had been done in the last few days. Widespread campaigns had been launched in factories, schools, public bodies and civic organizations to protect the city, its industries and educational institutions. All available armed men were being mustered to prevent the enemy from carrying out wanton destruction on the eve of their downfall. Vigorous efforts were being made to propagate the Party's policies, with the aim of winning over the masses and speeding up internal disintegration within the ranks of the enemy. The overall task was to carry the city safely through the dark hours before the dawn.

The meeting had decided on a division of duties. Li Ching-yuan was put in charge of factory protection and rescuing the concentration camp prisoners — two extremely complicated and difficult tasks. So he was now in a hurry to brief himself on the latest developments in this rapidly developing situation. He must plan his next move without delay.

Li Ching-yuan maintained his usual calm and alertness as he walked among the crowds of pedestrians. He was dressed in the simple garb of an elderly office worker, and there was nothing to distinguish him from hundreds of others. He strode

along, preoccupied with the plan to rescue the prisoners in the concentration camps. To save these comrades would be far more difficult than protecting the factories. But he had made lengthy preparations, and the Municipal Committee had approved of his plan. According to this plan an advance detachment of the People's Liberation Army, with Hua Wei as the guide and assisted by a guerilla unit from northern Szechuan under Grandma's command, would head straight for SACO on the eve of liberation. The Municipal Committee had also agreed to send some armed workers' contingents from Chungking to help with the rescue operation. If the Party organization managed to keep in touch with the prisoners for just another day or two, they could arrange for the prison-break to take place at the same time as the surprise attack on SACO. There was a good chance of success — provided everything went according to plan. But Li Ching-yuan was more than usually worried when he considered the magnitude of the scheme, the complexity of the situation and the ever-present possibility of losing contact with the concentration camps.

It was nearly dark by the time he reached the hostel of the life insurance company. Cheng Yao was waiting for him impatiently.

"Has anyone come from the Yangtze Ordnance Works?" asked Li Ching-yuan before he had time to sit down. He was quite unlike his usual deliberate self.

"Master Workman Hsiao was here," replied Cheng Yao. "I told him about your suggestions. He said he'd like to see you."

"What about?"

"He wants to report on the work of getting staff members to revolt. . . ."

Li Ching-yuan nodded. "Make an appointment with him."

The Party organization at the Yangtze Ordnance Works had done a good deal of work among the technical personnel. The general manager, a munitions expert with a foreign education, had also been influenced by Cheng Kang. For years he

had disliked the way the U.S.-Chiang secret agents lorded it over the works. Just now he was vacillating and did not want to leave the mainland, and the Party organization at the factory was of the opinion that he could be won over.

"Hsiao also said that there's something they could do to help rescue the comrades in the concentration camp. They want to disarm the factory guards, force a secret agent to phone a false report to the Second Department and lure the chief agent into a trap. He said this would certainly throw a spanner into the enemy's plans. He hoped to keep Chen Sung-lin at the factory to help him."

Li Ching-yuan did not reply at once. It would not be a simple matter to draw an adversary like Hsu Peng-fei into such a trap. Nonetheless, the workers' clever scheme had opened his mind to new possibilities. Inducing the enemy to commit such mistakes would not only be beneficial to the rescue operation, it would upset the enemy's plans and might even enable the Party Underground to get vital information from the captives that would come in useful after liberation. He had to talk to Hsiao and study his suggestion carefully.

"Li Ching-yuan!" Cheng Yao burst out impatiently. She had been anxiously waiting for an opportunity to tell him something, but he had been pacing the floor all this time, turning Hsiao's proposal over in his mind. She could wait no longer, so she broke in on his thoughts.

"I have bad news for you."

Li Ching-yuan stopped in his tracks.

"We've lost contact with Chatzetung."

Li Ching-yuan's frown deepened but he calmly asked: "When did that happen?"

"The liaison post reported it yesterday," Cheng Yao replied in a worried voice. "They also said that Hua Tze-liang was very closely watched by the warder when he went to Tsechikou yesterday!"

"Are they still in touch with Pai House?"

"Yes."

Li Ching-yuan asked no more, but again paced to and fro. This was very serious indeed. Regular contact with Chatzetung had been established after the Underground had placed a comrade there to act as a warder. When the Tsechikou liaison post had been set up later with Hua Tze-liang as go-between, the links between Pai House, Chatzetung and the Party Underground had been strengthened. The exchange of information that was necessary if the rescue plan was to succeed depended on these links. Losing contact with Chatzetung would make things even tougher for the underground Party organization.

The disappearance two days ago of the comrade acting as warder was another source of worry for Li Ching-yuan. If anything happened to him, the Party might incur even greater loss of lives.

As foreseen, the enemy's work of destruction had been greatly intensified since the American Mission's arrival in Chungking. The enemy's plots had to be smashed if Chungking was to be saved; and the less damage the city suffered now, the easier future reconstruction would be. The loss of contact with Chatzetung made Li Ching-yuan all the more conscious of the critical situation there. There was every indication that the enemy was quickening the tempo of the slaughter. Li Ching-yuan groaned at the thought of his comrades. . . .

We must anticipate the enemy, he said to himself. But the question was how. He stopped in front of Cheng Yao, and as if to solicit her opinion and gain confirmation of his own views, he asked:

"What do you think of the present situation?"

"The enemy is like a mad dog," said Cheng Yao. "I'm really worried."

"Victory is at hand. . . ." Li Ching-yuan's brows contracted slightly. "But it won't be won easily."

Cheng Yao lowered her head in silence. After a moment she said: "I haven't been able to stop worrying about the comrades in the concentration camps since I heard of Sister Chiang's death."

"Yes, they are in very grave peril," admitted Li Ching-yuan. "That's why we must hurry. Nevertheless, we have come through more difficult times than these in the course of the revolution. We will go on with the rescue, even if we lose all contact with Chatzetung and Pai House. Lao Hsu and many other seasoned Communists have done invaluable work in the concentration camps, and I'm certain that our imprisoned comrades are prepared for any obstacles and will continue to act even if cut off from contact."

His words gave Cheng Yao new confidence.

"Our work in the schools and factories is also beset with problems, but there we have the masses to help us. Our biggest worry is still for the comrades in the concentration camps," Li Ching-yuan continued reflectively. "Our comrades are faced with many difficulties, maybe more than we realize. But the speed of the PLA's advance is winning precious time for them, and time means victory. The PLA's rapid advance will foil the enemy's schemes to destroy the city and be of great help to us in saving our comrades."

Listening to Li Ching-yuan, Cheng Yao began to get a clearer picture of the general situation.

"As you'll observe," pointed out Li Ching-yuan, "our armies have already shattered the enemy's defences and are closing in on Chungking. This is the key factor for the final destruction of the enemy, and what most helps us in all our work. The faster the Liberation Army advances, the greater the enemy's confusion. I'm confident that the enemy, strong as they still appear, will collapse completely within the next few days. Does this make sense to you?"

Cheng Yao nodded, and Li Ching-yuan continued:

"Similarly, the lightning advances of the PLA will arouse the people. No doubt you've noticed that the Party has been getting enthusiastic support from the masses recently."

"Yes," replied Cheng Yao. "I've heard that secret agents tried to kidnap professors of Chungking University and take

them to Taiwan, but the agents were defeated through the united efforts of the students."

"That is only one of countless examples," said Li Ching-yuan. Then his thoughts returned to more immediate matters. His face grew as stern as that of a general before a battle. "Have you passed on the order to the liaison post about delivering the arms?"

"I sent it the day before yesterday."

"Go back to Tsechikou," said Li Ching-yuan, "and tell them that the Party has decided to take a few dozen more comrades from the Ordnance Works. They will go to the liaison post and work in co-operation with the guerillas when they make their assault on SACO."

"Contact with Chatzetung has been broken off. How will the prisoners there know when to go into action?"

"They'll know what to do when they hear us shooting,"[1] Li Ching-yuan said with his usual confidence. "Tell the comrades at the liaison post that as soon as Pai House informs them of the time of the prison-break, they will come under Grandma's direction."

"I'll go at once."

"Just a moment," Li Ching-yuan said. "I received a secret telegram today. Hua Wei and an advance unit of the PLA have already set out. Their objective is SACO and they'll arrive very soon. Tomorrow morning you must go to Kikiang and wait there to get in touch with them."

He had originally intended sending Chen Sung-lin, but had changed his mind after Cheng Yao had informed him of Master Hsiao's request. He now gave her the password, the address and the details of her task.

Cheng Yao made a mental note of all this. The assignment was a complete surprise to her and she made no attempt to hide her pleasure.

"Li Ching-yuan, when I've got in touch with the troops, please let me join the attack on SACO!"

Li Ching-yuan nodded. "Most probably you'll see that eldest

brother of yours who used to work at the Chungking office of the Chinese Communist Party. He'll be coming back with the advance unit."

"Is that true?" Cheng Yao was overjoyed. She had not expected to see him so soon.

The door-bell rang before Li Ching-yuan had time to reply. A guarded expression came into Cheng Yao's eyes, as she listened attentively to the intermittent ringing of the bell. In low tones she said:

"One of our people."

"Go and open the door."

When Cheng Yao went out to answer the door, Li Ching-yuan stood by the window, peering through the curtains. A middle-aged man, dressed like a merchant; walked in. This was the comrade in charge of the Tsechikou liaison post, the "proprietor" of the Hsinchi General Store.

As soon as he entered he cried: "Lao Li!"

His obvious agitation startled Li Ching-yuan, who asked: "What's happened?"

"Contact with Pai House has been broken."

Li Ching-yuan put his hand to his glasses and didn't say anything.

"A new man is shopping for Pai House. Hua Tze-liang didn't come."

"Did they tell you the time of the prison-break?"

"No."

Another new development. Contact with both Chatzetung and Pai House had now been lost.

"There's no question about it, none at all," snickered Hsu Peng-fei into the receiver. He leaned back in his swivel-chair, crossed his legs and guffawed.

"Director, set your mind at ease. I guarantee that not a single Communist will escape!" He swung around in the chair as he listened to Mao Jen-feng speaking over the phone. Then he took the cigarette from his lips and started to report:

"The photographs of Yang Hu-cheng, Sung Chi-yun and their families, six of them all told, have already been sent to the Generalissimo. Those of Huang Yi-sheng and Chiang Hsueh-chin are being developed. . . . Yes, yes, all went according to plan. . . . Yes, all the electrified fences have been checked and repaired, and the voltage increased. Three additional cordons have been thrown around Special District Headquarters. I think we can say we've got total security." He flicked the ashes from the cigarette, took a puff and continued: "All the warders at Chatzetung and Pai House have been replaced. Yes, just in case. . . . In my opinion, the same men should not remain in contact with the prisoners for more than six months, or they will be influenced. . . . The old warders have been transferred to the various guerilla units, and have already left. . . . Have you any further instructions? . . . Yes, I've been informed. I'll be over at once. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei hung up, got to his feet, and glanced at his watch. It was nearly twelve. Just as he was going out through the door, Chu Chieh came in with a sheaf of papers.

"Sir! They've just sent in the demolition programme. Will you have a look at it?" Chu Chieh handed the top-secret document to Hsu Peng-fei.

Hsu Peng-fei leafed through the programme, then phoned Shen Yang-chai, who had drafted it. The latter told Hsu Peng-fei that the list of objectives he had sent him was too long, the deadline too early and the equipment insufficient. He also told him that there were not enough men in Li Chi-kang's all-purpose unit to go around, and the Ministry of Defence would only supply two thousand tons of TNT. To put it briefly, they had not got enough technical personnel or explosive if all six hundred targets had to stay on the list.

Hsu Peng-fei listened unhappily to Shen Yang-chai's account, then replied coldly that the list had been drawn up and sanctioned by the Generalissimo and the American Mission, and he had no authority to make any deletions. All questions should be referred directly to Mao Jen-feng.

Banging down the receiver, Hsu Peng-fei paced irritably to and fro. Everything was in indescribable confusion. His subordinates were such useless idiots that they could not carry out the plan; and his superior, Mao Jen-feng, lacked the drive and courage to make bold decisions. To make matters worse Mao Jen-feng had insisted on putting Yen Tsui and Li Chi-kang in charge of the planning for the guerillas and the agents remaining on the mainland, thus encroaching upon Hsu Peng-fei's authority.

Hsu Peng-fei skimmed through the demolition programme again, tossed it on the mountainous heap of papers on his desk, and left the office.

Ten minutes later, Hsu Peng-fei's car stopped in front of Building B 6, the Chialing Villa in the suburbs of Chungking. He got out and strode into the house.

A table was laid in the dining-room, and Mao Jen-feng was pacing the carpet, gloomy with worry. Looking up, he asked frostily:

"Why have you been so long?"

"I received the demolition programme just as I was about to leave," explained Hsu Peng-fei, his face covered with smiles. "I went through it and checked up to see how things were going."

"Shen Yang-chai has phoned. Says he's having trouble." Mao Jen-feng made a nervous gesture with his hand, as if to brush away his troubles. "Explosives, personnel, equipment — all problems!"

"The biggest headache is the shortage of explosives. As a matter of fact, the Ministry of Defence still has several thousand tons in stock."

"The bastards! Why don't they let us have it?" bellowed Mao Jen-feng. He had become so bad-tempered of late that even Hsu Peng-fei, who had known his temper for years, was mildly surprised. Mao Jen-feng's clenched fist came down on the armchair.

"I'll go to the old man . . . the bloody cheek! All those ex-

plosives sitting there and nobody using them. Do they want to give them to the Communists?"

"Director, all you have to do is to ring up the Mission. Once the Americans give the word, the Ministry of Defence won't dare to haggle."

Mao Jen-feng grunted, slightly pacified. He resumed his pacing, then after a minute or two, said impatiently: "It's after twelve. Why aren't they here yet?"

"I hear Yen Tsui intends to leave the MIB and go to Hongkong," Hsu Peng-fei remarked casually.

"The Americans have invited him to go there and act as vice-director of the Sino-American Intelligence Co-operation Organization. He's already told me about it, so that I can think it over," said Mao Jen-feng, sitting down.

"Being abroad has done him good," Hsu Peng-fei smiled significantly.

Yen Tsui came into the room at this juncture followed by Li Chi-kang. Yen Tsui greeted them with a pock-marked grin. Mao Jen-feng remained seated, but Hsu Peng-fei courteously stood up and shook hands with them.

Since his return with the American Mission, Yen Tsui's manner had become more arrogant than ever. As for Li Chi-kang, who had arrived at the same time — he had acquired an air which could only be described as one of overbearing conceit. One got the idea that his American uniform and leather jacket with a lieutenant-colonel's insignia on the collar were insufficient to show off the favour he enjoyed with the American agents.

"I'm sorry we're late, but we were inspecting the Ordnance Works," apologized Yen Tsui. "Our men can't get the explosives into the factories."

Only now did Mao Jen-feng turn to look at them. "Why not?" he asked. "Haven't our troops been ordered to move into the factories under the pretext of protecting them?"

"Workers' picket forces are guarding the gates."

"The Communists have been inciting them to protect their

factories," Hsu Peng-fei barked. "I've given the order to shoot down any worker who resists!"

"Shoot them down?" repeated Li Chi-kang. "Just go and see for yourself, chief. Public order in Chungking is one horrible mess!"

Yen Tsui smiled frigidly and drawled:

"The workers' pickets are armed to the teeth. Our men dare not open fire."

"Is it the same at all the factories?" asked Mao Jen-feng.

"More or less, but things are worst at the Yangtze Ordnance Works, particularly in the Artillery Plant!"

Mao Jen-feng was silent. After a long pause he said: "The old man has told me to leave for Taiwan this afternoon to make plans for our future operations. It's nearly half past twelve now, so let's have lunch." As he spoke, Mao Jen-feng walked up to Li Chi-kang and eyed him critically.

"Chi-kang, what's the most important thing you learned during your stay in the United States?"

Li Chi-kang came stiffly to attention and gave an American salute. "A population of several hundred million constitutes an overwhelming burden. No government can solve China's food problem." Then he spoke more slowly, so as to display his understanding: "Secret executions, widespread destruction, guerilla warfare and undercover agents, all these four major points in the American Mission's plan are intended to heap difficulties on the Communists, over and above this overwhelming population burden. Our task is to leave nothing but a shambles to the Communists."

Li Chi-kang glanced at his superiors, hoping to read approval in their faces.

Mao Jen-feng nodded. "I see the Americans have armed your intellect too! Your trip was not a waste of time."

Inhaling deeply from his cigar, Yen Tsui smiled and said flatteringly: "Director, it's thanks to you that this was possible."

Li Chi-kang declared self-importantly: "Some people say

that China failed because she lost the support of her people. That's nonsense. The support of the people is worth nothing. American dollars can change the colour of any country. Just give me enough air-dropped supplies, and I guarantee that within three years I'll turn Szechuan and Sikang into an anti-Communist outpost of the free world!"

"It's not going to be as simple as all that," said Mao Jen-feng glancing with satisfaction at Li Chi-kang, whom the Americans had repeatedly recommended to him. "The Communists are experts on guerilla warfare. Recent intelligence reports show the scale of their strategic intentions. The Communist armies are not only bearing down on Chengtu and Chungking from eastern and northern Szechuan, forcing Hu Tsung-nan and Sung Hsi-lien to fight decisive battles, they are also making an even more formidable move with their encircling drive into Yunnan through Kwangsi and Kweichow. Their intention is to cut our line of retreat to Taiwan and trap us like. . . ." He gestured with his hand, leaving the sentence unfinished.

"Li Chi-kang came today especially to bid you farewell," broke in Yen Tsui. "What instructions have you for him, sir?"

"Knowing that Li Chi-kang is staying in Chungking, my mind is at ease." Mao Jen-feng motioned towards the table. "Let's sit down. We can talk while we eat."

Picking up a bottle of wine, Li Chi-kang filled the glasses of his three superiors and then his own. Mao Jen-feng watched his movements, remarking:

"I seem to remember that you're a graduate of the Hsifeng Training School. Is that correct?"

"He was one of the best students. First in scientific and technical subjects," said Yen Tsui, as if this reflected some honour upon himself.

"How long have you been with Special Commissioner Yen?"

"More than five years," replied Li Chi-kang.

"Chi-kang is my most able assistant. I shall very much regret losing him."

Mao Jen-feng smiled. " 'One general is harder to come by

than a thousand soldiers' as the saying goes, but at this stage we are compelled to leave our best men on the mainland." Here Mao Jen-feng drank to their health, and asked: "Have you studied all the plans for organizing guerilla warfare and leaving undercover agents in Szechuan, Sikang, Yunnan and Kweichow?"

Li Chi-kang nodded and said smugly: "Nothing will go wrong in Szechuan and Sikang."

"Splendid!"

Mao Jen-feng then announced: "On behalf of the Generalissimo, I place you in charge of the entire territories of Szechuan and Sikang, including all the wireless stations, secret agents, guerilla forces and undercover personnel. I trust you will do your utmost to be worthy of the important mission entrusted to you by the Kuomintang and the state."

"I pledge to serve Free China and the Generalissimo!"

"The American Mission has already spoken to you about your duties. So let my parting words to you be those of Mencius: 'The one on whom heaven confers great responsibilities must be prepared to undergo both mental trials and bodily hardships.' They are words of wisdom, and are worth thinking over. . . . When the third world war breaks out in a few years' time and some atom bombs are dropped, the skies will again be clear. The old man had a long talk with the Mission yesterday, and summed up with these simple, concise words: 'We will hold out grimly and wait for the change to come!' " Mao Jen-feng looked Li Chi-kang in the eye. "The change is certain to come, but the waiting will be grim. Because it will be grim we will have to hold out. That is the only way by which we can bring about the change. You must be prepared to endure ten to twenty years of hardship. Of course, there is also the possibility that the change will come within a year or two. Have you heard what Washington told the old man? The United Nations will not tolerate the Red Peril spreading in Asia. . . ."

Yen Tsui nodded. "The Pentagon and the CIA are consider-

ing imposing an embargo, dispatching intelligence agents, and cooking up a few border incidents."

"And not merely border incidents," said Mao Jen-feng, emptying his glass and letting out a long breath. "This is the time to create as many disturbances as possible. What a pity we've lost so many of the men we left behind in Northeast China."

"The Communists often boast of the courage and steadfastness of their cadres, but we too have such men," bragged Yen Tsui as he emptied his glass. "Look at Li Chi-kang and his companions. They've undergone the most rigorous training in the United States. All the members of Li Chi-kang's unit have been tested and have been found to have the strongest possible nerves. Such men will never waver, not even if they fall into the hands of the Communists."

"A pity we have so few like them. As the ancients said, 'A man's true qualities are revealed in times of stress.' This is just as true today as it was then. Chi-kang, how old are you?"

"Thirty-two."

"Young and accomplished!" With a flourish Mao Jen-feng uncorked a bottle of vintage spirits, Maotai, exclaiming, "There's no kick to wine. The only drink for a connoisseur is Maotai."

"Delicious food and excellent wine! Too bad, women and song are lacking. . . ." laughed Hsu Peng-fei tipsily. He had been drinking hard in silence all this time.

"Come, bottoms up again!" proposed Mao Jen-feng with a loud laugh.

"Peng-fei," he asked, "have you ever tried the Japanese geishas in Taipei? They're even sweeter than your new third concubine."

A personal aide walked in and interrupted the conversation which was becoming ribald.

"Will Colonel Li please answer the phone?"

Mao Jen-feng nodded permission for Li Chi-kang to go to his office with the aide.

"A splendid fellow!" commented Mao Jen-feng. He turned to Yen Tsui and held up his glass. "My compliments. You're a good judge of men!"

"He's been working under me for many years," Yen Tsui smiled wryly. "He'd be more useful in Taiwan or Hongkong."

"People are needed on the mainland too," laughed Mao Jen-feng. "He's well-trained, and the Americans trust him."

"Nevertheless, Li Chi-kang has very little seniority in the service. I'm afraid that some may be unwilling to accept his leadership. . . . His rank of lieutenant-colonel seems inappropriate now that he has been given the heavy responsibility of directing the work in Szechuan and Sikang Provinces."

"Quite right. And as we need such men now, he should be. . . ."

". . . Promoted to full colonel," Hsu Peng-fei burst out, feeling very generous.

"Full colonel?" Mao Jen-feng put down his wine glass. He paced several steps down the room, then turned round and said to his guests: "We'll break precedents and make him a major-general. Yes, a major-general, like you two."

Without looking to see how Yen Tsui was taking this, Hsu Peng-fei frowned and his mouth tightly shut. He realized that Mao Jen-feng was playing a deep game. He had deprived Yen Tsui of his most able assistant and snatched away some of Hsu Peng-fei's powers, killing two birds with one stone. By promoting Li Chi-kang to major-general, he had put him on an equal footing with Yen Tsui and Hsu Peng-fei; and by placing him in sole command of undercover activities in Szechuan and Sikang, he had shown that he intended to whittle down Yen Tsui's following and to strip Hsu Peng-fei of his authority over secret service operations in the Southwest.

Yen Tsui seemed to be unaware of Mao Jen-feng's intrigue. He continued to puff at his cigar, a placid smile on his face. Perhaps he was happy over Li Chi-kang's promotion.

The phone on the window-sill began to ring.

Yen Tsui walked over and picked up the receiver.

"Hello! Yen Tsui speaking. Yes . . . yes," he said in English.

Hanging up, Yen Tsui came back to the table and reported to Mao Jen-feng:

"The American Mission wants me to go to Plum Garden at once."

Mao Jen-feng nodded. "You have my permission, but I want to have a talk with you before I catch my plane this afternoon."

Yen Tsui inclined his head in assent, and after shaking hands with Hsu Peng-fei, left the room.

Hsu Peng-fei watched Yen Tsui until he was out of sight. When he turned around he saw a hypocritical smile on Mao Jen-feng's face.

"How do you feel about Li Chi-kang's promotion?"

"I'm very pleased," replied the disgruntled Hsu. An uncontrollable fury seized him, and picking up a glass of Maotai, he tossed it down in one gulp and smashed the glass on the floor.

Mao Jen-feng glanced casually at Hsu Peng-fei.

"What's the matter, Peng-fei? Are you drunk?"

"Wine doesn't make a man drunk if he's not in the mood. A little Maotai like this doesn't affect me!"

Mao Jen-feng slowly stood up and walked around for a few minutes, then said:

"The situation in the Southwest is dangerous and complicated. My plans have to cover everything." After a pause, he added: "We must make even greater investment. Yen Tsui will remain in Yunnan to guard the international highway leading to Indo-China." Mao Jen-feng stepped up to Hsu Peng-fei and said slowly: "You too will remain on the mainland. If I remember correctly, you worked a few years in the Dalai Lama's office in Nanking, didn't you?"

"Routine public relations work. Cooled my heels there for three years."

Mao Jen-feng smiled. "That's why our American friends support my suggestion."

"Your suggestion?" Hsu Peng-fei cut him short. Pushing back his chair, he sprang to his feet, eyes flashing fire: "Don't say you're going to send me to that hellish place?"

"Eh?" Mao Jen-feng smiled bleakly. "It's heaven." He pushed open the window to let the cool breeze clear his slightly intoxicated brain, then turned to look into Hsu Peng-fei's furious and bewildered eyes.

"The British have said they'd rather abandon Hongkong than give up Tibet! Do you grasp the full meaning of those words?"

Hsu Peng-fei said nothing.

There was the sound of hurried footsteps. Li Chi-kang strode into the room, snapped to attention and reported: "The factory security department at the Yangtze Ordnance Works has just phoned. They say the workers are building defences in the factories and seizing explosives. Five members of the all-purpose team have been wounded."

Setting down his wine glass, Mao Jen-feng looked at him stonily but did not reply.

Hsu Peng-fei frowned. He knew that the situation in Chungking was far more serious than they dared admit. The many schemes to smash the Communist Underground that the Americans had engineered with his help had all come to naught. Apart from Hsu Yun-feng, the only other member on the Municipal Committee that he knew about was Li Ching-yuan and no more than his name; he had no idea what Li Ching-yuan looked like. As for the organization and activities of the Municipal Party Committee, he had learned nothing about that and had no means of doing so; and it was, of course, impossible to put a stop to their activities among the masses. But he would never admit his helplessness, and relaxing his frown, he assumed a confident air.

"We should act silently, but sometimes noise is effective too. We should suppress the insurgents with the loudest racket possible!"

Mao Jen-feng and Li Chi-kang stared at him.

Hsu Peng-fei then said confidently: "Director, I suggest we execute someone publicly as an example. That will help to put a stop to the troubles in Chungking."

"Execute whom?"

"The Communists' secretary for the Workers' Movement, Hsu Yun-feng. Have him publicly shot at the Yangtze Ordnance Works!"

Mao Jen-feng thought this over for a moment. He was unwilling to forgo the principle of executing political prisoners in secret, so he said undecidedly: "The situation is complicated. . . . Such a measure might have bad side-effects, don't you think?"

The telephone rang again. Li Chi-kang picked up the receiver, listened a moment, then said to Hsu Peng-fei:

"It's the security department at the Yangtze Ordnance Works. They've an urgent report to make."

Hsu Peng-fei took the receiver and suddenly shouted:

"Is that information reliable? What? . . ."

Replacing the receiver, Hsu Peng-fei told Mao Jen-feng:

"They've discovered a Communist, a certain Chen Sung-lin. He's just called a meeting, which representatives from all the nearby plants are attending. The factory guards are keeping them under close observation. Two newcomers were seen to arrive ten minutes ago, one is a middle-aged man with glasses whose surname is Li, the other a young woman, about twenty years old."

"What?" Mao Jen-feng's eyes widened.

"The man with glasses may be Li Ching-yuan, the leader of the Communist Underground," guessed Hsu Peng-fei. But it seemed odd that the factory security department should be so quick and accurate with their information for once.

"The young woman must be Cheng Yao," interjected Li Chi-kang eagerly.

"This is most valuable information," said Hsu Peng-fei. "We should act at once and make a clean sweep! If we catch Li Ching-yuan, the Chungking Underground will lose its leader

and be plunged into confusion." His mouth watered at the prospect, and he could hardly sit still. If such an opportunity had presented itself a few months ago he would have gone there without a second thought. But lately he had become more cautious, and avoided taking risks, however slight. He never showed himself in public except in the safest places. So he made no move to get up.

Impulsively stepping up to Mao Jen-feng, Li Chi-kang said: "Let me go! I'll round up the lot of them!"

"Do you know them?" asked Mao Jen-feng.

"Of course. Cheng Yao is Cheng Kang's sister. We used to be schoolmates at Chungking University."

Mao Jen-feng smiled and nodded. "Good, you may go."

Li Chi-kang saluted and prepared to leave, but Mao Jen-feng once more raised his wine glass and proposed: "One more toast! Till we meet again!"

Li Chi-kang raised his glass and tossed it back at a gulp.

"Order has broken down completely in the factories. You'd better take extra men along," advised Mao Jen-feng.

"It won't be necessary," was Li Chi-kang's cocksure reply. "I've outwitted Chen Sung-lin before, and Cheng Yao is hardly dry behind the ears yet. They won't escape me!"

"I wish you success."

Li Chi-kang saluted once more and felt the gun at his belt. Spinning around, he hurried out of the room without looking back.

28

A heavy steel padlock hung at the door of each cell. The death-like silence of the concentration camp was broken only by the monotonously regular tread of the patrolling guards. Their heavy boots seemed to be trampling on the nerves of every prisoner. The sky beyond the barred windows was overcast with dark clouds, against which the close-strung wires of the electrified fences stood out in stark relief. The abnormal calm that often precedes a storm hung in the oppressive air.

Liu Sze-yang looked at Hu Hao with disapproval. His behaviour had been very erratic the last two days, and he was now sitting alone in a corner, avoiding the eyes of his cell mates. Troubled thoughts lay behind his staring eyes: Liu Sze-yang did not like his ill-considered behaviour, and had already told him to stop writing. Last night again he had seen him furtively raise the floor-board, take out paper and pencil and write for a long time. This was no time for that sort of thing. The least carelessness might have fatal consequences for all the prisoners. Liu Sze-yang felt that it was necessary to have a talk with him and stop his irresponsible behaviour. He told Cheng Kang what he had observed the night before.

Cheng Kang too felt that Hu Hao was behaving in an irresponsible way, and suggested that he might be nursing some secret sorrow.

"I'll talk to him," said Cheng Kang. "Go and sit by the door and keep an eye on the warders."

Cheng Kang beckoned to Hu Hao, who hesitated a moment, then slowly stood up and moved over. He gazed at the floor

and did not answer Cheng Kang's whispered inquiries. At last he burst out unhappily:

"I beg the Party to have confidence in me!"

"What makes you think that it doesn't?"

"The students arrested with me have all been given daggers," Hu Hao replied at once.

Cheng Kang's frown relaxed. Gently, but seriously he said: "If you want the Party to have confidence in you, you must first trust the Party yourself."

"I want a dagger!" Hu Hao held out his hand with stubborn insistence.

"You can't use one," Cheng Kang replied firmly. "Your eyesight's too poor."

Hu Hao trembled, and tears welled up in his eyes. "I know this place inside out, and I know what's going on." He was breathing deeply with emotion as he went on: "When the time comes, please treat me the same way as you would a Communist Party member. . . . Let the Party test my loyalty." He thrust a trembling hand inside his jacket, brought out a neatly folded letter, and pressed it into Cheng Kang's hand.

"Why write? Isn't it safer to tell me by word of mouth?"

Hu Hao lowered his head and did not reply.

Cheng Kang unfolded the sheets of paper. The first line read:

> Dear friends-in-arms, comrades by conviction, please allow me to address you this way.

Cheng Kang turned his back to the door and cautiously spread the letter on an open book before reading on.

> I wish to say, respected and beloved Communist Party members, some things which I have long wished to tell you. I hope you will forgive my irresolution, and beg you to transmit to the Party my longing for communism.
>
> I am a student who came as a refugee from Shantung to Szechuan during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression. I was then sixteen years old. I and some equally ignorant students who were unwilling to live as slaves under the enemy's heel set out on the long trek to the Great Rear Areas, in the hope of continuing our studies. To offer our small contribution to the country was our sole aim. But we took

the wrong road. How I regret that I did not go to Yenan, the sacred centre of the war against Japan. In our ignorance and stupidity we knew nothing of the true nature of the Kuomintang reactionaries. We believed that they too were fighting to defend the country. My heart nearly breaks when I recall this. Only after our arrest did I slowly come to understand who was defending the country, and who was making war against the people.

I shall never forget the terrible injustice with which we were treated. In 1941, we four refugee students could not afford the train fare, so we set out from the Sixth Government Middle School at Chingmukuan to walk to Chungking, intending to take the entrance examinations at a vocational school. How were we to know that, as we followed a little path under Mount Kolo, we had blundered into the prohibited grounds of SACO? The secret agents had not yet installed the electrified fences along the boundary line, so how were we to blame? They arrested us despite our explanations and our pleas for justice. The secret agents saw our examination permits and knew that we were innocent students, but because they were afraid that we would disclose their underhand schemes against the people if they released us, the heartless monsters insisted that we were Communist spies. We were cruelly tortured and incarcerated in this living hell, with our bodies covered with wounds.

I thank the comrades in this prison. So many nameless martyrs helped to guide us out of our ignorance, and opened our eyes to the full horror of the Kuomintang reactionaries. Our joy was even greater, when we found in this black pit the Communist Party, the hope of our country and our ideals. In this we are far more fortunate, despite our afflictions, than other students in the Kuomintang-controlled areas, many of whom are just as ignorant as we were. The entire Kuomintang-held area is one black hell, and I am certain that the anguish and despair of countless young people are no less agonizing than the tortures we have undergone.

I am not a member of the Communist Party, but I place all my confidence and hope in communism, in the Party of the people. Nine years have elapsed since our unjustified arrest, nine years of youth that will never come again. How could we but yearn for the victory of the truth? How could we but long to devote our lives to this truth? During these days of boundless misery I have studied unceasingly, seeking knowledge, thinking and tempering myself. If ever the time comes when I shall step out of these prison gates, I shall plunge myself heart and soul into the flames of the revolution and give my life to the cause of communism.

Time after time, the deaths of our comrades fanned the flames of my fury. I shed no tears; I knew only hatred. As long as I lived, I would fight. I resolved to write a record of all that I have observed, and let the people know about the untold bloody crimes committed by the U.S.-Chiang secret agents. I would be a historical witness to this dark era, and indict it before all humanity. I would faithfully put down how I had seen with my own eyes countless Communists sacrificing their noble lives for the revolution and for the ideals of the human race! Night after night, over all these years, I have risen quietly, and, by the faint

glimmer of the light through the grating, written and written. My eyes have been ruined in this way, and I have become extremely near-sighted, but I am not sorry. The many tortures have weakened my constitution. My hair is streaked with grey, though I am not yet thirty, but my heart has become more staunch. I live to hate the enemy and to expose their crimes. I also live for victory. I have no regrets, no sadness. I only hope that I, like a Communist, may become a true fighter.

Year after year, the reactionaries have massacred not only revolutionaries, but also countless innocent young people. The enemy shall pay for their crimes. Dear comrades, never forget that these bloodthirsty murderers must not be allowed to escape the final reckoning, even though they flee to the ends of the earth. Blood must be paid for in blood!

Victory is at hand. How my heart pounds and how I hope to go out alive so that I may offer my insignificant life to the revolution and fight in its ranks! I will feel remorseful till the end of my days if this desire is not fulfilled. How I envy the young people living in the radiance shed by Mao Tsetung, those young people of the future who will always be younger in heart than I. If I succeed in escaping this hell, killed though I may be on the very threshold of the prison gates — I shall take advantage of that precious moment of liberty to tell the youths: "Do not lay down your arms! The reactionaries have not yet been wiped from the face of the earth!"

I beg the Party to accept this letter as my application for membership. I beg the Party to test my determination and prove me in the course of struggle!

Cheng Kang felt that he had looked into the depths of a passionate soul. He was certain that a new member would soon join the fighting ranks of the proletariat. He would have liked to read this application for Party membership aloud to all his comrades, but that was impossible now. He folded up the letter and slipped it, for the time being, between the pages of the book. When he looked up he met Hu Hao's uncertain, anxious eyes. Many years of prison life had taught him silence, and he found it easier to express his feelings in writing than in words. Cheng Kang did not speak either, but he looked at the agitated Hu Hao with encouragement and trust in his eyes. Hu Hao felt in his pocket again and brought something out. He gave it to Cheng Kang and whispered:

"Here's my contribution to the preparations."

Cheng Kang felt a small, hard object in his hand. It was a key ground from a piece of metal. A key for their cell door! Without a word he put it straight into his pocket. His eyes

said: "That was the right thing to do. Everyone should take the initiative."

There was a noise on the staircase, and Hu Hao quietly moved away from Cheng Kang. Peering out of the window, Cheng Kang saw that it was a new warder bringing food to the cells.

Liu Sze-yang took the bowls of vegetables which were handed in through the hole of the door, and Cheng Kang went to fetch the rice. While they were eating, Liu Sze-yang asked Cheng Kang if he had talked to Hu Hao.

Cheng Kang nodded.

Liu Sze-yang looked anxiously at the window and asked again: "Where's the madman? Why is a warder bringing the food now?"

No one knew what had happened to Hua Tze-liang. Cheng Kang said gloomily: "He's disappeared."

"Perhaps the agents have dragged him off to the mountains to become a bandit." Liu Sze-yang knew that in the last few days SACO military vehicles had been setting out for various places with agents from the Guerilla Training Headquarters.

"Quite likely. That is, if he hasn't been killed," replied Cheng Kang, lowering his head over his food. Liu Sze-yang had not been told that Hua Tze-liang was one of their own people, so he did not know that heavy responsibilities rested on his shoulders, or that his disappearance meant unexpected difficulties for the escape plans. But Cheng Kang did not want to say too much. He had learned from his more experienced comrades to keep his worries to himself and not to alarm others.

"Warden!" A deathly pale Yang Chin-hsing pushed open the door of the office and rushed in. "Hua Tze-liang . . . has escaped."

Lu Ching had been studying the plans for the secret executions. His mind was still on the names "Hsu Yun-feng" and

"Cheng Kang" as he looked at Yang Chin-hsing and asked uncomprehendingly: "What's that?"

"I just had a phone call," blurted Yang Chin-hsing. "It happened last night, when the lorries reached the Pi Mountains. Hua Tze-liang suddenly disappeared after the men had put up for the night."

"Don't make a mountain out of a molehill. What does it matter if a madman escapes? Does that call for. . . ." Lu Ching did not finish the sentence. The professional instinct of a veteran secret agent gave him sudden doubts. Was the man really mad? Why should a madman want to avoid going into the mountains as a guerilla?

"When did he escape?"

"No one knows. They only found out this morning," replied Yang Chin-hsing. "The Second Department has sent the Chief of Operations to trail him with dogs."

This was a stunning blow to Lu Ching. The fact that Hua had managed to fool his experienced eyes all these years indicated that he was no ordinary adversary. Anxiety flooded into Lu Ching's gaunt, cruel face. Hua Tze-liang had been continually in and out of his office, sweeping the room and burning papers. He could hardly have missed hearing Yang Chin-hsing's voice when the agents were discussing various secrets. . . . Horror-stricken, Lu Ching muttered: "He — he must be a very important Communist!" He reproached himself bitterly for not having confined Hua Tze-liang to his cell, and for not having kept him under close observation after the dagger had been discovered on General Huang. Why had he accepted Yang Chin-hsing's imbecile suggestion?

"Did the phone call come from the Second Department?"

"It did. The chief's blowing his top," replied Yang Chin-hsing.

Lu Ching paled.

"The Second Department has decided to organize a search. They say Hua Tze-liang must be found!" Fully aware of the seriousness of the situation, Yang Chin-hsing told Lu Ching

all he had learned over the phone. "The chief banged his fist on the desk when he got the news. He's on his way here now to make a personal investigation. Warden, the chief's in a flaming temper. The Operations Section phoned on the sly to tell us. No one dares to stop him."

Lu Ching jumped to his feet. "What! He's coming?" He glared ferociously at Yang Chin-hsing. "Who did Hua Tze-liang associate with? Who put him up to it?"

"Er, er . . ." Yang Chin-hsing retreated before Lu Ching. "He never talked to anyone. . . ."

"You're the head warder! I'm asking you, who's at the bottom of this?"

"I — I . . ." Yang Chin-hsing backed to the door, incapable of replying.

The phone rang. Returning to his desk, Lu Ching forced himself to pick up the receiver. It was, however, Yen Tsui's voice that came over the line. Relieved, Lu Ching took his handkerchief and wiped the cold sweat from his forehead, then he said respectfully: "Yes, yes. . . . The chief isn't here yet. I'll tell him as soon as he comes that he's to ring the Mission. . . ."

The warders on guard in the passages paced back and forth nervously. Some agents removed the rust-spotted lock from the main gate of Pai House and pushed open the heavy iron doors which had remained shut for years. They swung back with loud creaks.

"Cheng Kang!" Liu Sze-yang called softly, looking significantly towards the open gate. "Someone's coming!"

Liu Sze-yang edged closer to the window and saw Lu Ching, all smiles, ushering in some men.

"Cheng Kang," Liu Sze-yang called again, but Cheng Kang did not reply. Instead he picked up a book and slowly opened it. Hu Hao squatted motionless in his usual corner, and with the exception of one or two other prisoners who went over

to the window, no one showed any interest in what was happening.

A group of armed and uniformed men approached. The one in the lead, giving orders right and left was Hsu Peng-fei.

"What's he doing here?" someone asked in a whisper.

"Who knows?"

Hsu Peng-fei strode up and down the corridors between the cells, followed by a crowd of agents. He stopped at the window where Liu Sze-yang was standing. Liu looked him squarely in the eye.

"Chief," said Lu Ching, approaching Hsu Peng-fei, "Hua Tze-liang used to live in that cell opposite. . . ."

Hsu Peng-fei ignored Lu Ching's remarks, stepped forward, and stared through the bars. His face was expressionless as he looked at one prisoner after another. His glance came to rest on Cheng Kang, who was seated on his pallet and turning the pages of his book with an air of complete detachment.

After a while, Hsu Peng-fei and the other agents, guided by Lu Ching, went over to the opposite cell. Hsu Peng-fei looked in through the window, while questioning Lu Ching. Liu Sze-yang wondered why Hsu Peng-fei was making this personal inspection, but could find no reason.

"Liu Sze-yang," said Hu Hao anxiously, "they're watching Lao Chi too closely."

As Hu Hao had lived in the cell opposite for many years, he had come over to find out why the agents were spending so long there. Liu Sze-yang did not hear him. His thoughts were on the remarks he had just overheard. Why had Lu Ching mentioned Hua Tze-liang? Did Hsu Peng-fei's coming here mean that Hua Tze-liang was in trouble?

The agents were still at the cell opposite. Liu Sze-yang left the window, walked to the door and peered through the hole into the other cell, trying to see how the men in it were reacting. They were not reacting at all. No one even raised his head to glance at the agents.

Liu Sze-yang felt Cheng Kang's eyes watching him. He

went over to tell his friend what Hsu Peng-fei had been doing, but before he could speak, Cheng Kang asked: "Can you guess why Hsu Peng-fei's come here?"

Liu Sze-yang shook his head.

A smile spread over Cheng Kang's face as he said softly:

"He's come to tell us that Hua Tze-liang is at large. Hua is one of our people." Cheng Kang did not try to conceal his excitement.

Just then Hu Hao came up and sighed with relief as he said: "They've left."

Liu Sze-yang glanced at Cheng Kang, who was again thoughtfully turning over the pages of his book, and returned to the window to continue watching the enemy. The agents were disappearing around the corner.

Hsu Peng-fei went on with his inspection. When they came to the row of low buildings, Lu Ching informed him: "Our own people are locked up here."

"Have those who had dealings with the Communists been shot?"

Lu Ching nodded.

Hsu Peng-fei entered one of the cells, where agents were enjoying privileged imprisonment. He frowned at the sight of the listless, apathetic men.

Lu Ching called the prisoners to attention, then announced in a loud voice: "The chief has come to visit you! Men are needed at present, so the chief has given orders that you are to be treated leniently. We hope you will serve the Generalissimo loyally. Report immediately to the Second Department!"

The secret agents — some joyful, others feeling very uneasy — began packing their belongings in nervous haste.

"Chief," said Lu Ching, walking out of the cell, "that major-general who was the former warden of the Sian concentration camp is being held upstairs. Do you want to see him?"

"I'll send a car for him later on."

"Sir!" came a shrill cry from upstairs. "Sir! I've been wronged."

Hsu Peng-fei stared haughtily at the shouting man. It was the cripple. He had clambered up the railings and was clamouring desperately for attention, waving a sheet of paper.

"Sir! You must read my report. I have a great plan for defeating the Communists. It will save the nation. I have valuable information: the Communists at Pai House are planning a mutiny!"

"Who's that fellow?" Hsu Peng-fei asked with mounting fury.

"He used to be commander of the Generalissimo's guard."

"I've been wronged, sir. I beg you to set me free. . . ." The voice choked, then rose to a wail: "I have suffered injustice for more than ten years! Let me go out! Let me fight with our guerillas. I know how to deal with the Communists. I have always been loyal to the Generalissimo. Do a kind deed!"

"Useless idiot!" said Hsu Peng-fei, turning away with a gesture of dismissal.

Lu Ching glaring, shouted at the man. "Stop yelling or I'll have you shot! This is disgraceful!"

"A loyal servant of the state does not fear death! I am a faithful believer in the Three People's Principles!" The despairing cries rose to frantic howls. The cripple's legs collapsed under him and he tumbled to the floor, still screaming. "So you won't set me free, Sir? All right, all right, then I don't want to live! I'll commit suicide! Take me to the radio station, I'll kill myself in public! You don't know how to deal with the Communists. People like you are bringing about the downfall of the Kuomintang and the nation. You are betraying the Kuomintang and the nation . . . ! I'll broadcast this to the whole world, I'll kill myself for party and country. My name will go down in history . . . !"

The agents with Hsu Peng-fei paid no attention to his ravings. Lu Ching made a slight sign to Yang Chin-hsing, who ran up the stairs. The cripple was rolling on the floor, his

arms flailing the air. Yang Chin-hsing stood over him, and suddenly his hands shot forward and clamped around the man's throat. . . .

In another cell Hsu Peng-fei saw bookcases thick with dust. He looked at Lu Ching with dissatisfaction.

"What's all this?"

"The library," replied Lu Ching, feeling as if he were marching up to a cannon muzzle.

"Library?" Hsu Peng-fei smiled bleakly.

Goose-flesh crept over Lu Ching, for that smile was more terrifying than any of his outbursts of anger. "Just a few old books . . ." he stammered. "At one time there was a policy of leniency."

"Close it!"

An agent walked up and whispered something into Lu Ching's ear.

"What's up?" Hsu Peng-fei asked, his hard eyes on the stammering Lu Ching.

"A phone call from the Mission. They want to talk to you." Lu Ching did not dare say that it was Yen Tsui. He had told Hsu earlier that Yen Tsui had phoned, but Hsu Peng-fei had only glowered at him.

After a slight hesitation Hsu Peng-fei went to the warden's office, sat down at the desk and picked up the receiver.

"Hsu Peng-fei speaking."

It was Shen Yang-chai's voice which came over the wire. He said that he had been told by the Mission to find out the whereabouts of Li Chi-kang. The Americans were waiting for a reply. . . . Before Shen Yang-chai could finish, Hsu Peng-fei bellowed:

"Li Chi-kang has many top secrets. He knows all the plans for undercover agents and guerilla fighting. It would be disastrous if any of those leaked out!" He deliberately raised his voice so that if a third person were listening to the call he would hear him. "His disappearance is very peculiar. There

hasn't been any news about him since he left. . . . I suspect he's gone over to the enemy!"

"No, no!" Shen Yang-chai hastened to explain. "The Americans maintain that Li Chi-kang's disappearance merely proves how chaotic things are in the Southwest! Anyway, he knows too much. The Americans want him back dead or alive."

"Li Chi-kang is Yen Tsui's man. Yen's responsible for him!" Hsu Peng-fei's face was swollen with anger. He was certain that Yen Tsui was standing beside Shen Yang-chai, so he added: "We'll have nothing to do with the matter."

Shen Yang-chai was suddenly silent, and the sound of indistinct murmuring came over the phone, as if someone were being reprimanded. After a few moments, Shen Yang-chai stammered: "Has the escaped man been . . . caught yet? This . . . this is serious. . . . We can't even keep the political prisoners under control. That's too . . . too. . . ."

Li Chi-kang's sudden disappearance was evidence of how fearsome the Party Underground was; and Hua Tze-liang's escape showed that he was losing control in the prisons. These two successive disasters made Hsu Peng-fei more conscious than ever of the precariousness of the situation, and also made things extremely difficult for him. He was just about to cut Shen Yang-chai short and tell him to report to the Mission that he had already ordered a search for Hua Tze-liang, when another voice came over the receiver.

The vice-head of the American Mission, the former Special Adviser who spoke fluent Chinese, had seized the receiver from Shen Yang-chai's nervous fingers.

"Execute Hsu Yun-feng at once!" The American's voice was harsh with barely suppressed anger.

"He was to be executed tonight, together with Cheng Kang," said Hsu Peng-fei, keeping a grip on himself. "This is in accordance with the plan you yourself approved. . . ."

"Plan? You still talk about plans?" the voice bellowed. The abrupt change of tone startled Hsu Peng-fei. "The defences at White Horse Mountain have completely collapsed. The

commander of the front has run away and no one knows where to.... All the political prisoners must be executed today!"

"Yes, yes," Hsu Peng-fei forced himself to say. "But the time's too short and we haven't got sufficient forces."

The American was unrelenting. He ordered Hsu Peng-fei to assemble execution squads at once and finish off the prisoners, first at Chatzetung and then at Pai House. The bodies were to be burnt and all traces obliterated by the evening at the latest — there were to be no excuses for putting it off. Hsu Peng-fei argued a long time over the phone. Finally the American promised to let him have some flame-throwers to compensate for the shortage of manpower, Hsu Peng-fei's biggest worry.

Hsu Peng-fei put down the receiver. Never had his resources been stretched out so thin. Undercover work, guerilla fighting, demolitions — all were desperate for men, dragging away his subordinates, upsetting his arrangements. He now had only the warders and the operatives from the Second Department to draw upon for the execution squad. The PLA would have to advance so quickly, wrecking all schedules and throwing everyone in such confusion.

Hsu Peng-fei stared in helpless rage at Lu Ching, and to relieve his feelings, he yelled:

"If anyone escapes during the executions, I'll have you shot at once!"

Lu Ching shrank back. "The Mission has told me to report at Plum Garden," he mumbled.

"So you want to run away to the States too?" said Hsu Peng-fei with a short, ugly laugh. "Well, you won't. Now that Li Chi-kang has vanished you'll stay to take over his work."

He could well guess the terror and despair in the wild-eyed Lu Ching's heart. He stepped up to him and transfixed him with a glare. His pent-up fury exploded, and he gave Lu Ching two resounding slaps across the face.

Then, hands clasped behind his back, Hsu Peng-fei walked up and down the room, trying to recover his composure and

thinking over his next move. His face gradually resumed its usual impassivity. Looking out of the window he said:

"Tell the executioners to get ready for Hsu Yun-feng and Cheng Kang."

Lu Ching nodded.

"Call out the guard!"

"Yes, sir."

"Is the acid tank ready?"

"Yes, sir."

Lu Ching motioned to Yang Chin-hsing who immediately came to attention and asked: "Are we to bring them out now?"

Hsu Peng-fei said slowly: "I want to see Hsu Yun-feng. Lead the way!"

Once more Hsu Peng-fei appeared in the prison yard. He walked past the silent cells, and turned towards the tunnel beside the administration office. Yang Chin-hsing hurried forward to turn on the light, and Hsu Peng-fei entered at the head of the secret agents.

There was a stench of decay. Hsu Peng-fei took out his handkerchief and held it before his nose. Bent almost double, he passed the underground cell where Little Turnip's family had lived, and came to the first iron door. Yang Chin-hsing unlocked it and led the way to the second door, thence down a flight of damp stone steps, to the third door. This was the entrance to the dungeon. Unlocking the heavy iron door, they descended another few steps into the dungeon itself.

Cold, clammy rock shut them in on all sides. An electric bulb temporarily lit up the cavern. Chill, fetid air blew in through the open door.

An enfeebled man reclined in the furthest corner of the dungeon on a pile of rotting hay.

Hsu Peng-fei stepped forward. Removing the handkerchief from his face, he called most affably:

"Mr. Hsu."

There was no answer.

Hsu Peng-fei waited a moment, then called again: "Mr. Hsu."

The man shifted his emaciated body and inspected the secret agents with glittering eyes. Hsu Yun-feng had grown much weaker since he had been brought from Chatzetung to this isolated dungeon almost a year ago. Not a vestige of colour remained in his face, and his wide cheekbones stuck out prominently. He seemed a different person from the old Hsu Yun-feng, although his eyes held the same unquenchable fire and authority. They stared all dangers and threats in the face without flinching.

"I have come especially to give you some good news, Mr. Hsu."

Hsu Yun-feng straightened up, his heavy leg irons clanking against the rock. Accustomed to the darkness, he quickly recognized Hsu Peng-fei under the dim electric light. Not a word passed his lips.

"Maybe," said Hsu Peng-fei, an evil smile on his face. "You are somewhat behind on the news of the past year, eh, Mr. Hsu? Let me put you in the picture. The Communist forces have entered Szechuan in two columns, one from the east, the other from the north, the National Army is retreating all along the line, and Chungking will fall any day now. . . ." Hsu Peng-fei took out a cigarette case and proffered it to Hsu Yun-feng. The latter ignored it. Hsu Peng-fei withdrew his hand and nonchalantly lit one for himself. Blowing out a cloud of smoke he asked: "I believe, Mr. Hsu, that you must be very happy at this news!"

"Naturally."

Hsu Yun-feng did not hide his feelings and a smile lit up his gaunt features.

"Things have developed exactly as you predicted, Mr. Hsu," continued Hsu Peng-fei in slow, even tones. "The Kuomintang cannot escape its doom. Nevertheless, the progress of history isn't without its ups and downs. I have the pleasure to inform you of something else. I'm confident that the authorities have made certain preparations, such as explosives, fuses and time bombs. When the Communist forces enter the suburbs, it's

possible that the famous mountain city of Chungking will cease to exist. . . . Who knows, maybe the victors will perish together with the city."

Hsu Yun-feng laughed out loud. The startled Hsu Peng-fei was reminded of Hsu Yun-feng's laughter at the Second Department more than a year ago, but this time it disturbed him even more. He lost his composure, and jeered at Hsu Yun-feng:

"Chungking will go up in smoke before dawn tomorrow. I take it that this news can hardly make you happy, Mr. Hsu."

"I have not the slightest anxiety," replied Hsu Yun-feng cheerfully. "I'm convinced that it is not Chungking which will vanish before the dawn, but those demons who fear the light of the sun! Your blood-stained hands will be held back and bound by the people! The skies clear after a storm. Chungking will be delivered to the people unharmed."

"I have yet another piece of news which I do not intend to conceal from you," said Hsu Peng-fei with a sardonic leer as he surveyed the confident Hsu Yun-feng. "Victory is at hand for you Communists, but what a shame you'll not be alive to witness it yourself! I wonder what your feelings are on this, your last day on earth, Mr. Hsu."

Hsu Yun-feng smiled unperturbed. "I can satisfy you on that point. I was an ordinary worker, who was subjected to all the torments and persecutions of the old society. In the end I chose the path of revolution and became a man feared by the reactionaries. When I look back on my choice, I feel proud and satisfied, because I have lived to see the victory of the proletariat in China. The sweeping success of the revolution has proved that my personal ideals coincide with the wishes of the people of my country. This thought gives me boundless strength. All men must die, but for a man to link up his life with the undying, revolutionary cause of the proletariat is the supreme glory! Those are my feelings, here and for ever."

Hsu Yun-feng rose and slowly stepped up to the secret agent,

looked into his eyes and said with a smile, "And what are your feelings at this moment?"

Flabbergasted by this unexpected question, Hsu Peng-fei did not know how to reply.

"Maybe you'll get away, but you and your kind will not escape the judgment of history!" Hsu Yun-feng's voice struck deep into the empty, despairing soul of his adversary. "You dare not admit it but you must know that your class, your rule and your forces have been crushed by the wheel of history, never to rise again! U.S. imperialism's planes and guns cannot avert your fate. Do you think undercover agents, destruction, and bandits in the hills can save you from your doom? You don't believe it yourself. Look at the strength of the people, look at their victories! Can you say you're not afraid? Not trembling? Not filled with despair and frustration? Of course, you can't. Your future is indeed dark!"

Hsu Yun-feng disdained to say more. The threat of death could not daunt this revolutionary. Dragging the rusty iron fetters, he stepped past the petrified enemy agents and walked up the steps towards the open door of the dungeon. Halfway up, he halted, and in ringing tones commanded:

"Go ahead! Lead the way!"

By Li Huan-min

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THE night deepened. A howling icy gale blew down from Mount Kolo, driving the fallen leaves before it. The dim prison lights outside the cells swung to and fro.

Yu Hsin-chiang stood at the grating, his face reflecting his anxiety. Powerful lights had just been installed in the office outside the prison wall, and the shadows of the secret agents flitted along the wall in a devils' dance.

Since losing contact with the Party Underground, the prisoners at Chatzetung had no way of finding out what was going on outside, and did not know how far the People's Liberation Army had advanced. As they were cut off from outside support, they would have to rely entirely on themselves in the forthcoming battle, which greatly increased their difficulties.

The enemy's desperate activities this evening were an indication that the decisive moment was imminent. All the inmates of Cell 7 were silently waiting for orders except Yu Hsin-chiang and the students, who stood watching at the cell door.

Yu Hsin-chiang shivered in the icy draught. He heard a disturbing patter on the tiled roof. Perhaps it was rain but the sound was too loud.

"Hail!" someone said softly. Yu Hsin-chiang strained his ears. Amidst the wild rattle of the hailstones he heard a low rumbling, rising and fading. He thought he had noticed the sound before the gale had started, though not as close and clear. He had ignored it before, as he was concentrating on watching the enemy. It could not be thunder in the winter! Perhaps the enemy was blowing up the city and its factories.

Yu Hsin-chiang's face suddenly shone with joy, and the palms of his hands began sweating with excitement. Hot tears flowed from his eyes. He spun around and shouted to his cell mates: "Listen! Cannon fire! The artillery of the Liberation Army!"

As if in confirmation, another rumble as of spring thunder was heard. This was indeed the sound of the people liberating themselves, the sound for which they had longed for countless days and nights. Now that they heard it, powerful emotions were released. Several days previously, just before contact with the Chungking Underground had been broken, they had learned that the People's Liberation Army had entered Szechuan. But who would have thought that the victorious roar of artillery would be heard so close, so soon afterwards.

Great strength surged in the heart of every man, welding them together into a mighty force.

"The People's Liberation Army is coming!"

"Elder Brother, let's move right away!"

"Comrades," Elder Brother was deeply stirred, perhaps more than anyone else. The booming artillery was a mighty support to the prisoners. He advanced to the centre of the room: "Comrades, get ready at once."

At this very moment, a slip of paper from the comrades downstairs was pushed between a crack in the floorboards and quickly passed through the crevices in the walls until it reached Cell 7. Taking the slip from Yu Hsin-chiang, Elder Brother read:

"The enemy may start their massacre after midnight. We suggest. . . ."

Yu Hsin-chiang's eyes flashed as his lips formed the words: "Going into action?"

Elder Brother said softly: "Not so fast. We must choose the right moment. The enemy will tell us when it comes!"

"As soon as our comrades at Pai House hear the shooting," added Ting Chang-fa, "they'll know we've started the ball rolling."

Yu Hsin-chiang clearly sensed the silent bonds between the

People's Liberation Army, the Party Underground, and the prisoners at Chatzetung and Pai House, bonds that no force could sever.

A tattoo on the bamboo clappers was followed by the sound of a motor vehicle. Then the headlights of a jeep lit up the road between the mountains. Little Ning, who was standing by the door, suddenly shouted: "Searchlights!"

The white beams flooded the yard. A warder hurried in.

"Attention please, gentlemen! I have some good news, some excellent news," he announced in a loud voice. It was the Gorilla, his face wreathed in smiles.

"Let's hear what he's saying," said Ting Chang-fa, walking over to the door and patting Ho Yi-chang's shaven head, to make him keep quiet. The Gorilla was nodding and bowing towards all the cells.

"An order has just come from the Second Department, and I have some most satisfactory news to pass on to you. The Southwest Bureau has accepted all the terms of the People's Liberation Army, and Chungking and Southwest China will be peacefully liberated. The Southwest Bureau ordered a cease-fire ten minutes ago. The Second Department has been instructed to guarantee the safety of all you gentlemen. Within two hours, special vehicles will take you to the headquarters of the People's Liberation Army. . . ."

"Peaceful liberation?" Little Ning asked Ting Chang-fa, both pleased and surprised.

"Congratulations, gentlemen! In the past I have undoubtedly been responsible for some misunderstandings in the course of my duties. With the coming of peace, I'll have the opportunity to make up for my transgressions to some extent. I am absolutely delighted." After more bows, the Gorilla advanced two paces and raised his hands: "Will everybody please pack their belongings! The representative from the Southwest Bureau will be here any moment now."

Little Ning and Ho Yi-chang wildly grasped Ting Chang-fa's

arms, but Ting shouted to the Gorilla with a grin: "Well, why don't you unlock the doors?"

Taken by surprise, the Gorilla hesitated, then said with an apologetic smile: "I quite understand your excitement. But I'm responsible for you until the representative arrives. I hope you gentlemen won't mind being inconvenienced a little longer, so that we can avoid any disorder."

"The lying bastard!" Ho Yi-chang's face grew dark. His elation was gone.

Elder Brother slowly walked to the door, gesturing for the others to make way. Then grasping the bars, he put his head through the door-hole and shouted to the other cells: "Be quiet, Comrades!"

Elder Brother glared at the Gorilla and shouted: "We are all delighted to hear about the peaceful liberation, but let me call your attention to the fact that the protection of the political prisoners is not only your responsibility, it is ours as well. We have the right to take part in and supervise all the work pertaining to our rehabilitation." As if he were going to take over then and there, Elder Brother continued: "To prevent disorders, I request on behalf of all the prisoners that you send a delegate at once to discuss the details."

"I can act as delegate," said the Gorilla hurriedly.

"The warden is not qualified to represent the Kuomintang regime," replied Elder Brother coldly. "We will negotiate directly with the Southwest Bureau which has accepted the peace terms."

The Gorilla hesitated. Then with a pained, embarrassed smile, he bowed again towards the silent cells. "Yes, yes, of course. . . . However, the representative from the Southwest Bureau has not come yet. Can we wait for a moment?"

"We can." Elder Brother then called to the other cells: "Comrades! Pack your bundles and get ready for the lorries! Did everyone hear?"

"Yes!" came the ringing reply.

The Gorilla smiled and nodded with approval.

Elder Brother looked at him and said reprovingly: "Your warders are still brandishing their guns and glaring at us as if we were enemies. You'd better do something about it."

"Yes, yes. I will ask the Second Department for instructions right away." The Gorilla nodded apologetically towards Cell 7 as he hurried out of the yard.

He walked into the office, mopping the cold sweat from his forehead. Glancing at the Owl, he asked:

"Did you see that?"

"Yes, I saw it."

The Owl looked at his superior with admiration, and said, "The chief is waiting for you to call him up."

The Gorilla seated himself at the desk and picked up the phone. He reported what had happened with pride, and said that all had turned out as expected.

"We can keep them quiet for the time being . . . but be quick!" he urged. "How soon can the execution squad get here?"

He knew that things were changing fast and upsetting all the plans. The last-minute decision to execute the prisoners that night had caught him and Hsu Peng-fei unprepared. The ominous booming of artillery, suddenly starting up a couple of hours before the massacre could take place, pounded at his taut nerves. Everyone else was jittery and things were almost out of control. It was almost midnight, and the execution squad had still not arrived. Hsu Peng-fei had ordered him to keep the prisoners under control by hook or by crook. He had succeeded up to now but was afraid that they might discover what was going on any moment.

"Chief," the Gorilla lowered his voice cautiously. "They've demanded negotiations. Yes, yes, their leader is in Cell 7 after all. . . . A most unexpected discovery. . . . He's swallowed the bait!" Narrowing his eyes craftily and nodding his head, the Gorilla listened to the instructions coming over the phone.

"Yes, yes. Keep up the illusion, withdraw all the warders."

The Owl ran in and whispered into the Gorilla's ear: "I've just had a look. They're all packing!"

The Gorilla nodded. "Chief, there's no doubt now that he's the prisoners' leader.... Yes, I'll invite him out to parley in half an hour.... Right.... That'll keep them from getting suspicious before the execution squad arrives. . . . Yes, yes. . . . As soon as he comes out . . . without a sound. . . . Right! . . . Grab their leader and they'll be helpless...."

The Gorilla turned to the Owl with a cunning grin. "The executioners will be here within an hour. In half an hour's time you must go to Cell 7 and ask him to come out. . . ."

A thunderous salvo cut him short, and a shaken Gorilla peered out of the window into the darkness. The Owl gripped the butt of his pistol and looked at his superior with frightened bewilderment:

"Didn't the head of the American Mission say only two days ago that there was nothing to worry about from the military angle? That we could hold out to the end of the year, at least?"

"Er — y-es! The chief said so again, at the last meeting. . . ."

"Warden," the Owl broke in, "I'm afraid that if we pull out the guards — before the execution squad gets here. . . ."

The Gorilla hesitated a moment then said firmly: "Pull them out! Our only way to hold the prisoners down is by bluffing them."

The Owl was on the way out when the Gorilla called him back.

"Head-warder," he whispered uneasily. "Take some men and keep the prisoners under supervision, but don't let them notice you." His voice became almost inaudible. "If anything happens, fire a warning shot!"

A few minutes later, the Gorilla assembled the guards and warders in his office, and after giving some brief instructions asked:

"Is all the equipment ready?"

"Yes," replied an agent.

"Allocate at least one machine-gun and two carbines to each

cell. As soon as the execution squad charges into the yard, the warders will co-ordinate with them and fire into the cells. . . . Have all the flame-throwers and electrified fences been checked?"

Several agents nodded.

"The whole lot must be killed and the bodies burnt," the Gorilla said. "This operation was planned by the American Mission itself. We'll be held responsible if anyone escapes."

A salvo of artillery fire set the agents fidgeting nervously. The Gorilla forced himself to be calm and hastily assured them:

"That — that's not artillery. A lot of ammunition dumps are being blown up tonight." Then he shouted out of the window: "Head-warder, how's the situation inside?"

"All in order."

"Good. . . . Everyone must do as the head-warder says. When the job's finished, you'll all be rewarded."

The blackness of the night and the unusual quiet in the prison buildings disturbed him, and he hurriedly ordered: "Head-warder, one more thing! Tell the execution squad to stop their cars on the other side of the mountain, and turn off their searchlights. Oh, and don't beat the bamboo clappers. We mustn't do anything to alarm the prisoners."

"The enemy has already told us when we are to go into aciton," Elder Brother said quietly to the men pressing around him as he stood in a corner. "As soon as the cell doors are opened, we move."

The men nodded, trying to control their excitement.

"Yu Hsin-chiang, tell the other cells to be ready."

Yu Hsin-chiang left the group and began getting in touch with the other cells through the hidden crevices in the walls. The men scattered and returned to their own places. They brought out their crude weapons, gripping them tightly.

Elder Brother walked by the inmates, inspecting them one by one, then stopped in the middle of the cell.

He had to speak frankly to all these close comrades: "We're

taking action at a time when we've lost contact with the Party. Conditions are difficult, but we're confident that by combining our efforts we can break through the enemy encirclement. We must carry out the Party's plan with determination! Those comrades who succeed in breaking out are entrusted with a mission by the rest of us: You must give your all in the building of a new China!"

Elder Brother's resolution gave the prisoners strength and courage. He voiced the plans they had cherished all these long years, the hopes of countless days and nights. All these things now beckoned to them, and stirred them in this hour when life and death, success and failure hung in the balance.

The men watched Elder Brother intently, waiting for their orders.

"This is how we'll proceed," Elder Brother announced in firm steady tones. "As soon as they come into the cell, we'll seize their guns and keys, which Yu Hsin-chiang will immediately take to Cells 1 and 2 downstairs. He will also help the women prisoners to escape. A team under Ting Chang-fa will block the main gate as soon as possible and intercept any attacks by the enemy. After the comrades in Cells 1 and 2 downstairs join Ting Chang-fa, they'll concentrate on drawing the enemy's fire to provide cover for the break-out of the rest of our people. The other comrades of Cell 7 will unlock the remaining cell doors. Then everyone will go behind the building, demolish the wall and the wire fences by the pool, and make an escape-route.

"Our plan is to 'shout in the east and strike in the west.' Cells 1 and 2 and Ting Chang-fa's group have a hard task. You must tie down the enemy's main forces, and at the same time employ offensive tactics, so that they will think that we're making our break-out in that direction. Then they won't dare scatter their forces, and we will be able to break through the wall on the other side where the enemy's defences are weakest."

Taking his pipe from his mouth, Ting Chang-fa stood up

quickly. Elder Brother stepped over to his group and solemnly announced:

"The Party thanks you and wishes you success." Then he threw his arms around Ting Chang-fa's shoulders. "Convey the Party's thanks to Cells 1 and 2. Lao Ting, you will need both courage and cunning. When our main force breaks through, the enemy is sure to lose his head. You must seize that opportunity to charge out of the concentration camp!"

Once more Elder Brother's arms tightened around Ting Chang-fa's shoulders.

"Comrades, are you ready?"

Ting Chang-fa nodded.

Elder Brother returned slowly to his corner. He looked reassuringly at every tense face.

Ting Chang-fa walked over to the door. Standing beside Ching Yi-ching, he peered out.

"Comrade Ting," Ching Yi-ching asked softly, "how much longer must we wait?"

Little Ning and Ho Yi-chang watched him tensely.

"What's the hurry?" Ting Chang-fa smiled faintly and rubbed his beloved pipe. "There's still time for another game of chess."

Ting Chang-fa's remark was followed by a thunderous artillery barrage. The guns were louder, and much closer than before. Unnoticed by the prisoners, the hail and wind had stopped.

"The People's Liberation Army is advancing!" Ching Yi-ching shook the grating of the door in his joy. "Lies about peace can't drown the sound of victorious cannon!"

"You're right!" grinned Ting Chang-fa, but before he had time to say anything else, someone called out quietly:

"They're coming!"

Heavy boots tramped up the staircase.

"Look sharp!" hissed Ting Chang-fa.

The Owl and two other warders walked up to Cell 7. The

head-warder's sharp eyes peered through the bars at the inmates, but he saw nothing suspicious.

"Will the representative please come out!" said the Owl, unlocking the door. Not a muscle moved on Elder Brother's face as he stood up and walked to the door. It creaked open.

"Please," the Owl began, but in that instant a heavy stone crashed on his skull. Pincer-like hands fastened around the windpipes of the other two agents and their shouts died in their throats. Yu Hsin-chiang quickly relieved them of their keys. Several dozen of them were tied together, each attached to a small wooden tag marked with a cell number. Yu Hsin-chiang removed the keys for Cells 1 and 2 and the women's cells and thrust the rest at Elder Brother. Taking the two captured pistols Ting Chang-fa had handed him, he bounded out of the door. No one was in sight. All the warders were outside the prison wall. This was very convenient for the prisoners. Stooping low, Yu Hsin-chiang sped along the long corridor towards the staircase, and went down the steps two at a time, a mere shadow in the dim light. As he reached the ground floor, a sheaf of papers dropped unnoticed from his pocket. It was the "Verses from the Barred Window," which Liu Sze-yang had given him as a parting gift.

Eager hands reached out through the hole of the door of Cell 1. Quickly, Yu Hsin-chiang thrust a key and a gun into them. Then he ran to Cell 2, and unlocked the door, first passing the other pistol through the hole to Squad Leader Wang, a New Fourth Army man and a comrade-in-arms of Lung Kuang-hua.

By this time Ting Chang-fa, with a pair of heavy iron shackles in his hand, had come downstairs with a group of comrades from Cell 7. They sprinted towards the main gate which led to the warders' offices. It was closed but not locked. Once they got out, they would be able to strike directly at the enemy's headquarters and throw them into confusion.

Shadows moved on the other side of the gate. Ting Chang-fa went forward boldly and pushed it open.

"Who goes there?"

Before the startled exclamation died away, two shots rang out. The men guarding the gate swayed and slumped to the ground. The young squad leader ran up, waving his pistol.

"Comrades, charge!"

Behind him were the prisoners who had just emerged from Cells 1 and 2. Together with Ting Chang-fa and his men they raced for the gate. At that instant pandemonium broke loose. Loud shouts came from every cell like water bursting through a broken dyke.

Searchlights suddenly stabbed at the charging men.

Rat-tat-tat-tat-tat. . . .

Machine-gun bullets poured through the gate in an evil stream.

"Charge, charge! Grab their guns! Quick!"

The comrades pressed forward, hurling rocks and iron chains at the enemy. Some flung themselves forward to snatch their weapons. The agents fell back in a panic, but the machine-guns stuttered with redoubled frenzy. One prisoner fell, then another. They were caught in a cross-fire, and they had no cover.

"Comrades, victory is ours!" shouted a comrade with grey-streaked hair. The next moment he threw up his arms and collapsed in the glare of the searchlights. Struggling to his feet, he staggered forward again.

Yu Hsin-chiang was opening the doors of the women's cells. The shots and cries so excited him that he could not open the lock. He twisted the key hard, but it snapped in the hole. Bullets whined past, making him angrier than ever. Forgetting to keep under cover, he grappled furiously with the lock, and with a mighty wrench of his powerful hands he tore it off. The women comrades in the neighbouring cells had now broken down the doors and were streaming out.

"Quick! Quick! Over to the pool!"

Waving his arms, Yu Hsin-chiang urged the women on. For a brief instant a woman with Prison Flower in her arms was picked out by a searchlight, then she vanished in the darkness.

Another woman, her tunic dark with blood, rushed forward, holding up a five-starred red flag. Just as she ran past Yu Hsin-chiang, something struck her heavily in the shoulder. The flag seemed about to fall. Yu Hsin-chiang rushed forward to help her and saw that she was Sun Ming-hsia. Blood was streaming down her face. She steadied herself and once again raised the red flag.

"Hurry! All the women are out of the cells!" she cried, then ran forward again. Some papers in the yard caught her attention. Was it something her comrades had lost? With her free hand she picked them up and thrust them inside her tunic, little knowing that they were Liu Sze-yang's "Verses from the Barred Window."

Now that the women comrades were out of the building, Yu Hsin-chiang considered his next step. Should he go with them and help the main force under Elder Brother to demolish the wall and the electrified wire fences, or should he stay with Ting Chang-fa's group?

The firing from outside the gate grew in ferocity. Bullets spewed into the cells, sending pieces of brick flying, raising billows of dust and smoke, and pitting the walls until they looked like beehives. Doors and windows splintered under the intensifying barrage, and the air was acrid with the smell of blood and gun powder. Yu Hsin-chiang caught sight of the bodies of many comrades sprawled by the open doors, some still writhing amidst the hail of bullets.

Machine-guns rattled outside the iron gate. Obviously the enemy agents had been held down there, and were trying to prevent what they thought was a frontal break-through with concentrated fire.

The lights on the wall suddenly went out and everything turned black. This meant that some of the main force of the prisoners at the back of the building had scaled the wall and ripped down the electrified fences! In a few minutes, the wall would be knocked down, and Elder Brother would lead the

By Li Shao-yen

comrades out where the enemy did not expect them. Yu Hsin-chiang was jubilant.

The shouts of the comrades fighting the enemy in front had become fainter and he ran anxiously towards the iron gate.

It was open, no one was in sight. The scene of fighting had shifted outside. Yu Hsin-chiang started to run in the direction where the shots were thickest and the yells loudest. As he crossed the threshold, a dazzling jet of fire streaked towards him. The scorching air reeked of petrol. He stumbled, threw himself on the ground, another fiery stream hissed through the air, setting everything ablaze. Walls, beams, and everything sprayed by the enemy's flame-thrower, popped and crackled. Yu Hsin-chiang's clothes were on fire. Huge blisters rose on his face and arms, smoke filled his nostrils, and tongues of fire seared his flesh. He rolled on the ground to extinguish the flames. Beside him lay the corpses of many of his comrades, blood flowing from their wounds. Crimson pools glowed in the light of the flickering fires.

Comrades dying amidst bullets and flames, uttered their last defiant shouts:

"Long live the Chinese Communist Party!"

"Long live Chairman Mao!"

In spite of his burns, Yu Hsin-chiang sprang up and rushed towards the fighting. He did not see a single live comrade.

"Yu Hsin-chiang!" Someone grasped his arm as he was about to round the corner of the wall. It was Ting Chang-fa, hidden in the shadows. Yu Hsin-chiang stopped. Before them lay a garden with trees and flower beds. Further on was the office, defended by the agents. The searchlights had been smashed by vengeful bullets. The enemy was firing incessantly from the windows of the office, but the corner of this thick wall gave cover from their guns and flame-throwers. The trees and shrubs were ablaze. Comrades lay dead behind the raised flower beds. Flames still licked their bodies.

The enemy kept firing. The opposing sides, separated by the burning flower garden, had reached a stalemate, but Yu

Hsin-chiang noticed that very few of the attacking comrades were left.

"Let's charge!" he suggested.

"No, let them charge, we've got those fellows blockaded in the office," Ting Chang-fa pointed out. "That's just where we want them."

It was quite clear that the agents, pinned down in the office, could do nothing to prevent the prisoners on the other side from breaking out. Yu Hsin-chiang heard frantic shouts above the firing.

"They're phoning again," explained Ting Chang-fa. "They've phoned several times already for reinforcements. The guards at Pai House are coming to help them!"

By the light of the flames, they saw a group of agents coming nearer. The Gorilla was following them, stooping low and urging them forward. A figure jumped out of the shadows near the flower beds, holding an empty rifle like a club. As he raised it, shots rang out and he crumpled in a heap. Ting Chang-fa compressed his lips and pulled Yu Hsin-chiang back. Hugging the wall, he inched to the corner. The enemy was getting closer. In a moment they would be right in front of him. He raised the heavy iron fetters to shoulder level. Springing forward, he swung at the first agent, but the wily fellow saw his shadow and dodged the fatal blow. A stream of bullets tore into Ting Chang-fa's body. He reeled, regained his balance, then another burst struck him. Ting Chang-fa ground his teeth, and one hand clutching at his breast, he raised the chain with the other and brought it down with terrific force on the agent's forehead. With a muffled cry, the agent collapsed like an empty sack at Ting Chang-fa's feet, his head split wide open.

Yelling madly, the pack of killers fled.

Yu Hsin-chiang stooped to pick up the dead agent's submachine-gun, but a quick hand forestalled him. In the dark he could not tell who it was. The man raised the gun, took aim quickly and fired.

With a crisp rattle, bullets hit the backs of the enemy.

"Nice shooting," said Ting Chang-fa. Pressing his hands to his bleeding chest, he raised himself to see who the marksman was. The fires lit up the face of Squad Leader Wang. With a smile, Ting Chang-fa slowly leaned back against the wall. He did not move again.

Yu Hsin-chiang was just going forward to lift Ting Chang-fa when a loud crash came from behind the prison buildings. The high wall had toppled. The triumphant shouts must be those of his comrades rushing out! The rapid firing that followed told Yu Hsin-chiang that the escaping prisoners were engaged in a life-and-death struggle with the guards outside the wall.

"Ting Chang-fa! The wall is down!" shouted Yu Hsin-chiang. "Elder Brother and the others have broken out!"

Ting Chang-fa did not reply. Yu Hsin-chiang again shouted: "Lao Ting! Lao Ting!" He grabbed Ting Chang-fa's hand, but his pulse had stopped.

"Come back, Yu Hsin-chiang," the young squad leader called. The enemy had been startled by the shouts and the rumble of the collapsing wall. Realizing what had happened, they thrust the barrels of their machine-guns through the office windows and fired frantically. A volley of bullets riddled Ting Chang-fa's body. Yu Hsin-chiang's shoulder suddenly went numb. Hot, sticky blood welled from it.

"Quick! Withdraw!" shouted the squad leader, as he helped the wounded Yu Hsin-chiang away from the corner and back to the iron gate.

"You go first, I'll cover you!" said Squad Leader Wang. He dragged the creaking gate shut and locked it from inside, shutting the enemy out for the time being.

"Any man who retreats will be shot!" The Gorilla was heard screaming outside. "The prisoners are escaping. Chase them!"

"Charge! Kill!" yelled the agents to bolster up their courage.

Flinging himself flat behind the gate, Wang aimed through a grating, carefully picking his shots. He waited till several

dark silhouettes loomed up before calmly pressing the trigger. This was a most critical moment. Every extra minute gained gave one more comrade a chance to get away.

A red stream of bullets mowed down the onrushing beasts. One after another they collapsed, shrieking. More surged up. A shower of bullets spattered against the iron door. Suddenly Squad Leader Wang jerked and dropped his gun. With a howl, the agents flung themselves forward. Yu Hsin-chiang dived for the weapon and pumped a string of bullets into the foremost figures.

The enemy retreated behind the corner of the wall, afraid to advance. The Gorilla yelled frantically for a flame-thrower.

Something warm spurted from the squad leader's head on to Yu Hsin-chiang's burnt and blistered face. The young man's skull had been split open, and blood and brains were gushing out.

Tears in his eyes, Yu Hsin-chiang fired his last bullets at the crouching enemy. All he could think of was revenge.

A jet of liquid fire hit the gate, snapping the bars and buckling the iron plates.

At this instant, hurried footsteps approached Yu Hsin-chiang from behind. He looked back. It was Ching Yi-ching, his face streaked with blood and grime.

"Elder Brother has sent me," he panted. "We've broken through. You're to withdraw at once!"

30

IT was deep in the night. The lights in B 6 Building, in Chialing Villa, blazed on a scene of indescribable confusion. Telephones jingled incessantly, while tense voices answered, asked questions, scolded, recriminated. . . .

Ensconced in the Headquarters, Hsu Peng-fei kept nervously consulting his watch. He was in a villainous mood. After Mao Jen-feng's departure, he had moved for safety's sake to the suburbs as the city was in chaos, and almost without troops. He paced up and down like a cornered beast, puffing at a cigarette. He had just received an urgent dispatch from the Ministry of Defence informing him that forward contingents of the Communist forces had crossed the Yangtze somewhere between Chungking and Chiangchin during the night, and that Hu Tsung-nan's main force had broken and fled. The Chiangchin airfield had been occupied and all the military aircraft captured. The Communist forces were now driving towards Mount Pishan, a key point on the Chengtu-Chungking highway, intending to cut the escape route of the Kuomintang troops who were defending Chungking. Because of the rapidly deteriorating military situation and the inability of the Kuomintang army to hold back the People's Liberation Army, the Ministry of Defence had notified all military and administrative units to withdraw earlier than originally planned. Chungking was to be evacuated before morning.

Hsu Peng-fei glanced at his watch. Only a few hours to go. He picked up a cup and took a gulp of tea. It was thick with leaves, but Hsu Peng-fei was too agitated to notice the bitterness of the brew. He mentally cursed the American Mis-

sion and Chiang Kai-shek for having grossly miscalculated the speed of the Communist advance.

As he aimlessly twirled the knobs on the radio, he found a news bulletin from Taiwan. A woman's voice was announcing in cloying, artificial tones: "A frontline dispatch from Chungking by the Central News Agency says that since the Generalissimo has taken personal command, the armies of Hu Tsung-nan and Sung Hsi-lien have put up a joint defence with good results. . . . Today, at White Horse Mountain, the government troops threw back remnant Communist forces infiltrating into Szechuan from Hunan. Complete victory is reported. At the moment Chungking's defences are as strong as iron. . . ."

"Damn them!" Hsu Peng-fei switched off the radio. "Strong as iron! They can't even lie properly!" He was worried about the massacre of the political prisoners at SACO. There might not be time to carry it out, and he was about to make some inquiries over the phone, when the Chief of Operations strode in hurriedly and reported that the execution squad was ready to set out.

"Get going!" ordered Hsu Peng-fei. He picked up the phone and asked for Chatzetung, but a long time passed without anyone answering. He then told the operator to put him through to the SACO guard headquarters, and got through immediately.

"The execution squad is on the way," he said, raising his voice. "First dispose of Chatzetung and then Pai House. Keep a strict watch at the defence cordons. Everything must be sealed tight. The Communist forces are still a long way from Chungking. The guards are not to be withdrawn without my orders!" Hsu Peng-fei listened angrily to the complaints coming from the other end and then barked: "Nothing doing! If a single Communist slips through, you'll pay for it with your life!"

No sooner had he put the receiver down, than it shrilled again. He snatched it up.

"Hello, hello.... Hsu Peng-fei speaking. What? You didn't

blow up the Kikiang Bridge? . . . You ran into Communist forces? ... Where are they now?"

The agent who had been sent to demolish the bridge in an attempt to delay the advance of the People's Liberation Army, hastily went on with his report. He said they had met the Communist forces before even reaching Kikiang, and his three lorries, together with his technicians and explosives, had all been captured. He alone had managed to escape and had just reached Haitang Ford. Everything was confusion there. The ferry service had stopped and rumours were rife.... He had heard that representatives of the people of Chungking had arrived to welcome the Communist forces, and had already crossed to the southern bank of the river, carrying five-starred red flags.

Hsu Peng-fei impatiently heard him through, then yelled:

"Find some way to get across the river at once. Tell me the rest when you get back!"

He hung up, then decided to call up the Bureau of Waterways, to order a boat for his subordinate.

"Hello, is that Waterways Police Headquarters? ... What? The shipping company won't take orders? All the boatmen have run away? The bastards! That's rank insubordination! Have them all shot!"

Hsu Peng-fei gripped the receiver in a towering rage. After some time he dialled a number and shouted:

"Get me the Yangtze Ordnance Works. Operator! I want Yen Tsui! Yen Tsui!"

There was a protracted buzzing in the earpiece, then the flustered voice of the operator: "I can't get through. I haven't been able to get through for the last half hour...."

"Idiot! Connect me at once!" Hsu Peng-fei was so furious that he felt like smashing the phone. Then there was a voice on the line, with an urgent report from Tsechikou.

"What? What? I can't hear you, say it again. . . . Armed members of the Communist Underground. . . . What? Jail

break? Two-gun Grandma? . . . I haven't any troops! . . . No, I can't send you any reinforcements!"

Hsu Peng-fei shouted desperately at the operator: "Get me Chatzetung! Chatzetung! . . . Pai House! Pai House! . . . Guard headquarters!" But the telephone had gone dead and he was unable to pass this unexpected news to the agents who were to carry out the slaughter. Had the line been cut? Two-gun Grandma's sudden appearance was very serious.

"Check the line!" he bellowed. "Inspect the SACO telephone line at once!"

Just as he put down the phone, it rang again and he irately picked it up once more. "Who is it?"

It was Chu Chieh with a secret report from the airfield. He said the manager of the Yangtze Ordnance Works had not arrived. He had probably gone into hiding or might even have crossed over to the Communists. Then Chu Chieh lowered his voice.

"What?" yelled Hsu Peng-fei. "The American Mission has taken off? Mary has gone with the Special Adviser?... Who? Yen Tsui? Yen Tsui has run away with them?"

"They're so scared they'd run from their own shadows!" Hsu Peng-fei threw down the receiver and burst into wild laughter. "So the Americans have run, too, taking that slut with them!"

He hysterically gulped down some tea and threw the rest of it and the cup out of the window. All at once his face darkened and he shouted for an orderly.

An agent hurried in.

"How many men are left in the all-purpose team?" Hsu Peng-fei snarled. "Bring them all back from the factory and assemble them here. No, no! Tell them to go straight to Plum Garden and wait for orders! Get me a car at once. I'm going to SACO. . . . Get the guards into lorries, they'll be going with me."

Again the telephone began to ring. Hsu Peng-fei dug his heels stubbornly into the carpet but it jangled persistently, and with an oath, he finally reached for the receiver. He suddenly

snapped to attention and answered tensely: "Yes, this is Hsu Peng-fei."

A dry, hoarse voice came over the phone, so loud that Hsu Peng-fei had to hold the receiver away from his ear.

"Why aren't there any explosions yet, eh?" After a pause, the voice continued harshly: "We still have water and electricity here. What's the matter with you?"

"Yes, Generalissimo!" Hsu Peng-fei's tongue would not obey him. "We'll, at once, blow them up, at once. . . ."

At that same instant, a deafening explosion set the windows rattling. A second one blew a pane of glass from its frame. It broke into smithereens on the cement steps below. Relief spread over Hsu Peng-fei's face, as he pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his brow.

"They're blowing up, they're blowing up!" he shouted exultantly. "What a racket!"

The detonations boomed and echoed for about two minutes, then slackened off and finally died away.

"What? Only twenty?" the voice questioned. "I want all six hundred objectives destroyed before my plane takes off!"

Hsu Peng-fei held the phone in a daze. Another blast went off in the distance, then two more. He waited in trepidation hoping for more and bigger ones. But none came.

"You fool!" The voice on the line raged. "If you don't do a good job, bring your head to Taiwan!" There was a sharp click as the caller hung up.

"Yes, yes, we'll dynamite them at once. . . ." Hsu Peng-fei mumbled incoherently, not even realizing that the other had gone off the line. When he discovered that the line was dead, he hurled the receiver aside and bellowed:

"Shen Yang-chai!"

Shen Yang-chai pushed open the door and hurried in.

"What's all this?" Hsu Peng-fei demanded. "Why aren't there any more explosions?"

"The order came too late," stammered Shen Yang-chai, "and besides. . . ."

"How many more targets can be demolished?"

"We've arranged for over a hundred. . . . But I can't say just now. . . ."

"I'll have you shot," screamed Hsu Peng-fei. He stabbed a finger at the burning light bulb. "Blow up the power-plant at once!"

"Armed workers are guarding it. . . . Our men can't get in."

"Those Communists are everywhere." Hsu Peng-fei pounded on the desk in helpless wrath. "Then destroy the water works."

"We — we . . . can't get in there either. The workers seized the explosives, and the men we sent disappeared. . . ."

"Blockhead!" Hsu Peng-fei brandished his fist in Shen Yang-chai's face, so that he fell back several steps in fright. By the time Shen had collected his wits, Hsu Peng-fei was standing motionless at the window in the cold draught. His attention was suddenly attracted by a brightly illuminated spot on the opposite bank of the Chialing River. It was their most important target — the Yangtze Ordnance Works — but the factory showed no sign of being reduced to rubble. On the contrary, its blazing lights danced and sparkled on the dark waters of the river.

Hsu Peng-fei whirled around. "Look at that! Why haven't the Ordnance Works been blown up yet?"

"That . . . that's Yen Tsui's personal responsibility."

"Get that bastard on the phone!" Hsu Peng-fei had already forgotten that Yen Tsui had fled with the American Mission. Shen Yang-chai dialled repeatedly but got no reply. Hsu Peng-fei suddenly remembered that Yen Tsui had left, and his fury burst forth anew. "The swine! Go to the Ordnance Works at once!" "Now?" Shen Yang-chai recoiled in horror. He knew that going to the factory meant risking his life.

The telephone rang. Hsu Peng-fei jerked up the receiver.

"Who is it?"

"This is the Yangtze Ordnance Works," a voice came clearly over the line.

"Er — this is Hsu Peng-fei. Is that the factory security department? Who? Chen Sung-lin?" Hsu Peng-fei was thunderstruck. The voice at the other end continued to speak crisply into his ear, and what he heard made him shudder.

"So you haven't run away yet? Why don't you come to the factory? Last time we phoned you, you delivered Li Chi-kang into our hands. Don't think that you will escape either! I'm officially notifying you that the Yangtze Ordnance Works have been taken over by the people. You have many crimes to answer for, and even if you flee to the ends of the earth, you will not escape justice at the hands of the people."

The receiver dropped with a crash to the floor. In that instant Chu Chieh's report flashed through his mind. He had mentioned that the manager of the Ordnance Works was unwilling to leave the mainland. The arms expert must have gone over to the Communists.

Hsu Peng-fei stood there as if he were paralysed. After a while he recovered himself. With a desperate gleam in his eyes, he slowly hissed: "Blow up the Yangtze Ordnance Works at once!"

"Go! Go!" Hsu Peng-fei seized Shen Yang-chai by the collar. Shaking him violently, he ground out through clenched teeth:

"Don't you want to go? I'll have you shot!"

Again, the phone jangled with a nerve-racking din, lashing Hsu Peng-fei into an insane fury. He flung Shen Yang-chai aside and pounced on it. "You bastard!" he bellowed. "I forbid you to call up again!"

He was about to smash the instrument to pieces, when he suddenly froze in his tracks. The news now coming through the receiver made him stumble back and topple into his chair.

"What?" he shrieked. "The political prisoners at Chatzetung have escaped? Eh? The guerillas helped them from outside? You . . . you dirty bastards! You had all those Communists under lock and key, and you let them get away? . . ." He burst out laughing, like a man demented, a gambler who has lost everything.

Suddenly he howled into the phone: "Who told you to transfer the warders from Pai House?" Then, as if discovering that he still had something left to stake on one last throw, he calmed down. "Tell Yang Chin-hsing to take his men back to Pai House this instant! Collect the execution squad and liquidate the prisoners there!"

The receiver clattered to the ground and broke in two. Hsu Peng-fei raised his arms and shouted towards the door: "The warden at Chatzetung is guilty of gross dereliction of duty, and of endangering the party and the state. He's to be shot at once!" His voice echoed emptily. "Machine-guns! Machine-guns! Seal all the exits from Pai House with machine-guns." He sprang up, as if to make a last stand against an invisible foe.

"Wipe them off the face of the earth. Kill them! Kill them!"

Now mad with despair, he brought his fist down on his desk so hard that the glass broke. The splinters cut his hand and wrist, but he felt nothing. He waved his bloodied hands, raving and screaming in the empty office. He did not know that the advancing People's Liberation Army was already converging on the Paishihyi airfield, where the last plane, which was waiting for him, was about to take off. Even less was he aware that a detachment of mine and factory militia led by the Communist Underground was taking over the urban city districts. Liberation was coming to the people of Chungking.

Only the distant sound of rifles, artillery and barking dogs could be heard in the cell. The strange, oppressive silence made Liu Sze-yang's heart pound unnaturally fast, and his breath came in short gasps. He could not control his agitation in this hour that was to decide life or death.

Hu Hao came up, breathing even faster than himself.

"Liu Sze-yang, let's move now," he urged. "All the warders have gone out!"

"Wait another half hour," he said.

"Do you hear the shooting? They've gone into action at Chatzetung!"

Liu Sze-yang judged from the distance and direction that the firing must indeed be coming from the other concentration camp. Were the comrades there breaking out of prison, or did the shots mark the beginning of a bloody massacre? His heart grew heavy with apprehensions. Yet he had implicit faith in Cheng Kang's parting words. Suppressing the grief which Cheng Kang's death had caused him, he now whispered those words to Hu Hao.

Hu Hao listened in tense silence, then exclaimed: "You mean Hua Tze-liang is one of us?"

"Yes," said Liu Sze-yang, unable to conceal his admiration for this old comrade. He told Hu Hao — the only prisoner in the cell who had not yet formally joined the Communist Party, about the decision that Cheng Kang had passed on to him.

"Hua Tze-liang is bound to find some way of informing the Party Underground about the time of our break," he concluded. "In half an hour, a bugle will sound behind the mountain. That will be our signal."

Hu Hao, long unaccustomed to expressing his emotions, took Liu Sze-yang's hands in a tight grip.

Liu Sze-yang did not doubt that the Party's armed forces would appear punctually. Then, when the enemy was in a panic, a concerted attack from within and without would bring success with a minimum of casualties. But with still half an hour to go, the seconds and minutes went by on leaden feet, each seeming like a year. . . .

"What if something has gone wrong . . ." Hu Hao anxiously demanded.

"The signal will come on time!" replied Liu Sze-yang confidently. After a while he added: "But if the agents come to get anyone, we'll grab their guns."

Hu Hao asked no more. He lifted the floorboard, took out the manuscript he had been writing for so many years and tied

it with a strip of cloth to his waist. Then he sat down, clutching the dagger Cheng Kang had left him. Like all the other comrades in the cell he was tense and alert. Time dragged on. Only the sound of distant shooting broke the silence, as they waited for the bugle call from the mountains.

Someone coughed three times in the cell opposite. Liu Sze-yang started. That was the signal to act! Liu Sze-yang listened intently for the sound of the bugle, but only heard the quiet opening of the locks of nearby cells.

"Unlock the door," came a quiet voice. Liu Sze-yang rose at once, and taking out the key Cheng Kang had entrusted to him, he turned it in the padlock.

The prisoners were pouring into the passage from the other cells. After all his cell mates were out, Liu Sze-yang put the lock in his pocket for a keepsake. He hoped that this lock, this symbol of the rule of the U.S.-Chiang reactionaries, would some day be exhibited in a revolutionary museum along with many other trophies captured by the people. He stepped out of the cell to find Chi Hsiao-hsuan in the corridor, calm and self-possessed. A comrade whispered something into his ear and Lao Chi nodded, his expression unchanged. Liu Sze-yang noticed that the prisoners were grouped as previously arranged and waiting silently for the next move. He felt he had to ask Lao Chi:

"Why are we acting ahead of schedule? Weren't we to wait for outside help?"

Lao Chi, who had thought things out very carefully, turned and patted him on the shoulder. "The situation has changed. The prison-break at Chatzetung helps us a great deal. Didn't you hear the lorries going a while ago? That was Yang Chin-hsing leaving for Chatzetung with a large group of agents. They've only pulled out their men temporarily. They'll soon change their tactics and concentrate all their forces here before we break out."

Liu Sze-yang realized at once that now was the moment, and that any delay would bring greater danger.

"Your attention please, comrades," came a strong voice from among the prisoners. Liu Sze-yang recognized Lao Yuan.

"Our scouts have just come back. They report that the agents left here are keeping a close watch outside the walls. The main and side gates are covered by machine-guns."

Although the agents who remained were few in number and dared not come inside, they could use high walls, electrified fences and machine-guns to prevent any escape. Moreover, the walls were built of stone blocks, not brick and mud like Chatzetung.

"The prison Party organization has decided that we're to escape through a secret passage," Lao Chi announced.

"A secret passage?" Many of the prisoners were astonished.

"Liu Sze-yang, stay beside me," said Lao Chi, as he led the prisoners through the yard towards the block tunnel beside the administration office.

Lao Chi felt for the switch at the entrance. A second later the narrow tunnel was flooded with light, dazzling to eyes which had become accustomed to the dark. The damp musty smell was almost overpowering. Bending low, Lao Chi led the prisoners past the cell where Little Turnip and his family had lived, and stopped at an iron door. He took out some keys, unlocked it, then went on to the second door, which he also unlocked. Liu Sze-yang guessed that these keys must have come from Hua Tze-liang who had sent food to the man in the dungeon. Hsu Peng-fei had this morning entered this tunnel with a group of agents, and Liu Sze-yang remembered that immediately afterwards, Cheng Kang had called him aside to tell him of the plans for the prison-break.

"Careful!" came Lao Chi's voice, as he led the way down the slippery stone steps.

Liu Sze-yang cut short his reflections and passed the word to the man behind. At the bottom of the stairs, they came to the third door. Chi Hsiao-hsuan opened it, and another flight of steps led them to the dungeon.

Liu Sze-yang gazed at the uneven ground of solid rock and

the cold stone walls which were beaded with moisture. An icy drop fell from the ceiling onto his forehead. He wondered how many comrades had lived, struggled and been buried in this dismal hole.

Lao Chi looked around and thought for a moment, then took a slip of paper from his pocket, and unfolded it.

"Move the straw aside," he ordered.

Liu Sze-yang immediately set about the task. A foul stench rose from the straw.

"Pry out the third slab from the corner!"

Liu Sze-yang stared perplexed at the slab, which looked the same as any other.

Lao Chi pointed to the mortar in the cracks and Liu Sze-yang saw that there was a slight difference, only noticeable when carefully examined. Touching the mortar, Liu Sze-yang found that it was soft, and had been caulked in very loosely. Fragments fell away under his fingers. Further inside, there was nothing, all the mortar having been removed.

"Lao Hsu did it?" Liu Sze-yang was greatly moved.

"Yes," replied Chi Hsiao-hsuan. "Never did he stop working for the Party."

Some of the men pushed at the slab and it slowly gave way under their concerted efforts. The mortar left in the joints bore the marks of fingernails, and bloodstains, which had turned light brown with time, but still showed clearly against the white lime. Liu Sze-yang could almost see Hsu Yun-feng digging with painful, bleeding fingers, his courage sustained by his indomitable will and belief in victory.

"What's on the other side?" Liu Sze-yang asked.

"A fifteen-foot drop," replied Chi Hsiao-hsuan. "This is the foundation of the prison wall. The enemy will never expect us to escape from here."

With a last heave, the men pushed the slab through the opening. It fell into the pool at the bottom of the cliff with a loud splash. Fresh air and the smell of moist earth rushed

in. Now that the living tomb had been opened, the rumble of artillery could be heard.

"Go out, one at a time," directed Lao Yuan, producing a long rope made of strips of blanket.

"You take the lead," said Chi Hsiao-hsuan. "I'll bring up the rear."

Silently they clasped hands. Lao Yuan thrust his head through the opening, peered around, then grasped the rope and jumped. Another man followed, then another. . . .

"Lao Chi! Let me go to the office and make a phone call," proposed Liu Sze-yang.

"What for?"

"To tell the enemy we're escaping. That'll bring them here and lessen the pressure on Chatzetung."

The firing on the other side of the mountain had slackened, and lorries could be heard approaching. Chi Hsiao-hsuan listened, then shook his head:

"It's not necessary. The enemy will be back soon."

By now all the others were out.

"Let's go!" Chi Hsiao-hsuan leapt, followed by Liu Sze-yang.

Strong hands steadied Liu Sze-yang as he touched the ground. He could not see the man's face in the darkness, but he knew it was not Chi Hsiao-hsuan, as Chi himself had only just landed. Apparently, he too had been helped up by this person.

"It's me." Liu Sze-yang recognized Hu Hao's voice, and said nothing as their hands met in a firm grip.

"Halt! Who goes there?" The shout of a patrolling sentry was heard from the distance.

"Quick, let's go!" Chi Hsiao-hsuan urged in low tones as he groped his way forward between the rugged cliffs. There was no path and jagged rocks lay underfoot, but the student walked very quickly.

The footsteps of enemy agents clattered behind them and they saw a torch shining.

"Quick, send this forward," Chi Hsiao-hsuan whispered to Hu Hao, pressing the rope into his hands.

The beam of a torch caught the men scaling the mountain.

"Halt, or we'll fire!" shouted the enemy agents, but they dared not come too close.

Bullets whined past their ears. Grasping the wild grass in the fissures of the rocks, Liu Sze-yang kept climbing. Gusts of mist-laden night wind cooled his burning face. How wonderful to be free! He had forced open this iron prison with his own hands and escaped from this hell-hole on his own feet! As he breathed the bracing mountain air, freedom seemed to be just ahead, even though the firing of their pursuers was getting heavier. But as he was leaping over a thorn bush he suddenly cried out.

"What is it?" Chi Hsiao-hsuan immediately caught hold of him.

Liu Sze-yang did not reply. His hand moved slowly to his breast. He felt a warm liquid running down. A quiver ran through him, but then he thought of Cheng Kang, Lao Hsu, Sister Chiang, of the many comrades whose fate he did not know, and of Sun Ming-hsia. Thorns tore his prison uniform as Chi Hsiao-hsuan gently eased him to the ground.

Liu Sze-yang remembered how Cheng Kang had shouted slogans as he stepped out of his cell for the last time. He would have liked to do the same, but that would only give away his comrades' position. "Go, go," he repeatedly urged. "Never mind me." Fumbling in a pocket, he finally held out a fountain-pen to Chi Hsiao-hsuan.

"This belonged to Lao Hsu. . . . Use it . . . to write. . . ."

The crash of artillery was getting louder. Liu Sze-yang gazed at the glow of the flames rising from Chatzetung on the other side of the mountains. It cast a red reflection on his pale face. Was there a song in those flames? . . . Liu Sze-yang's lips moved imperceptibly, and almost inaudibly he breathed:

Listen, comrades:
Rolling like the spring thunder,
The artillery of the People's Liberation Army!
The people are liberated!

The people are victorious!
We have not sullied
The honour of the Party!
We. . . .

Tears streaming from his eyes, Chi Hsiao-hsuan laid down Liu Sze-yang's hand. It was already becoming cold.

Headlights flashed on the road skirting the lower slopes of the mountain, and the sound of motors could be heard distinctly. Several lorries from Chatzetung careered around the bend and screeched to a halt in front of Pai House. The agents jumped out. Chi Hsiao-hsuan straightened up and hurried forward.

The prisoners ahead had stopped beneath a towernig cliff.

"Climb this way," said Lao Yuan. "The enemy's dogs can't get up this cliff."

This was the route that had been selected beforehand.

Some of the men clambered on to the shoulders of their comrades, then inched their way up, grasping the protuberances on the rock face. The first to reach the top leaned over the edge and let down the rope. One by one the comrades were hauled up. A powerful beam suddenly swept the mountainside. The searchlight at Pai House was hunting for the escaping prisoners.

"Hurry, hurry!" urged the men above.

Slowly, the evil ray glided over the face of the cliff, then quickly returned and fastened itself on the clusters of prisoners.

"Stop! Stop!" yelled a pack of thugs at the foot of the mountain. Following the beam, they rushed up the slope. Machine-guns opened fire.

Tracer bullets struck chips from the rock, and sent sparks flying in every direction.

The beam moved to the base of the cliff. Showers of bullets sprayed the boulders. The figures at the bottom of the cliff gradually dwindled in number, until only two were left.

"Lao Chi, where's Liu Sze-yang?" asked Hu Hao.

Chi Hsiao-hsuan did not reply. All at once, he staggered. . . .

Amidst a rain of bullets, the rope was once more lowered.

Anxious voices urged them to hurry. Chi Hsiao-hsuan motioned for Hu Hao to go up, but he would not.

"You're wounded. You go first," he insisted.

There was no respite from the bullets. Sharp splinters of stone pierced Chi Hsiao-hsuan's face. Without another word, he grasped the rope and laboriously climbed up.

Once more the rope was lowered. Bracing his feet against the cliff, Hu Hao started to pull himself up, when a savage burst of firing startled him. His hold slackened and he fell down. Struggling to his feet again, he reached for the rope, when he heard the sound of snarling. A police dog, its fangs bared, leapt out of the shadows and made straight for his throat.

Hu Hao whipped out his dagger, crouched down and plunged it into the charging beast. . . . With a howl the dog rolled into the abyss, the blade embedded between its ribs.

Hu Hao spun around and caught the rope.

"Don't move!"

Eyes flashing fire, Hu Hao turned upon the assassin.

"Hands up!"

Hu Hao lunged forward with a mirthless laugh. Before the agent had time to fire or to dodge, Hu Hao locked his arms around him and heaved with all his strength. The entwined figures toppled over the brink of the chasm. The agent's scream of despair echoed from the depths.

In a voice gruff with sorrow, Chi Hsiao-hsuan ordered the men away from the cliff.

Several police dogs bayed and barked below, but they could not climb up. A swarm of agents fired at the retreating figures.

The searchlight moved up the mountain, relentlessly following the prisoners. Red streams of tracer bullets wove a curtain of death over the slope. Many of the prisoners in the lead fell.

"Quick! Scatter to avoid the searchlight!" shouted Chi Hsiao-hsuan.

But the beam clung to them, and the comrades fell one after another under the raking fire.

By Wu Chiang-nien

Someone came running back and gasped: "Lao Yuan is severely wounded. An enemy defence line is right ahead. There are electrified fences and two pillboxes!"

"Make a detour around the pillboxes and clip the wire!" said Chi Hsiao-hsuan who had lost a great deal of blood. In a dry, hoarse voice he ordered: "You take Lao Yuan's place at the fore. Break through at all costs. I'll continue to bring up the rear."

"But. . . ."

"Hurry up!" Chi Hsiao-hsuan shouted testily. "Lead the men forward. Don't bother about me!"

The searchlight pursued the prisoners as they scattered. Bullets traced threads of fire in the night sky. Then the finger of light caught Chi Hsiao-hsuan and stayed on him. He made no attempt to evade it. Instead he stopped and straightened up in its glare. He looked at his departing comrades, then calmly turned around to face the hail of bullets.

Scornfully, Chi Hsiao-hsuan stared down at the enemy below. Standing erect on a lofty boulder, he drew their venomous fire, determined to win time for his comrades' escape.

"Go ahead and shoot!" Crossing his arms, he spread his legs apart to get a firm stance. "Bullets cannot subdue a Communist!"

A smile on his pale face, the blood flowed unchecked from the wounds on his body and dyed red the crag on which he stood.

A sharp, clear bugle call rang out nearby — the signal of victory. How near it was! How stirring! Hua Tze-liang had come at last, at the most crucial moment. The Party had come, and with it the dawn of victory.

"The People's Liberation Army!"

"Hua Tze-liang has brought the People's Liberation Army!"

Chi Hsiao-hsuan heard the wild exultant shouts, and his face lit up as he listened with joy to the triumphant guns dealing death to the evil figures fleeing madly down the mountain. . . .

The searchlight suddenly went dead, but Chi Hsiao-hsuan

still stood on the bloodstained red crag, gazing at the prisons lying at his feet. In the distance, the fierce fires consuming Chatzetung illuminated the pines on the crest of the mountains. Nearby, a conflagration lit up the ruined walls around the shattered remains of Pai House. Explosions thundered far and near, as everything in SACO — that hell on earth — perished in flames and smoke.

Before Chi Hsiao-hsuan's glazing eyes rose a vision of countless golden starred red flags swirling and dancing in the breeze, and merging into a sea of crimson. His lips moved in a last smile.

By Niu Wen

红 岩
罗广斌、 杨益言著
吴凡等插图
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外文出版社出版（北京）
1978年（28开）第一版
编号：（英）10050—620
00425
10—E—632S

THIS novel is written by two ex-inmates of the U.S.-Chiang Kai-shek secret service concentration camps in Chungking, Szechuan Province, China. The year is 1949.

Focusing mainly on the actual life-and-death struggles inside the camps on the eve of the city's liberation, the story extols the revolutionary martyrs whose unfailing optimism, fortitude and resourcefulness enable them to overcome the ordeals of torture, hunger and truth drugs. They finally establish contact with the Party Underground outside the prison, strengthening the overall revolutionary struggle.

On the basis of the authors' intimate knowledge of the events in the countryside, factories, schools, U.S.-Chiang spy organizations and concentration camps as China's War of Liberation draws to a victorious close, the characters are superbly delineated and the story is magnificently built scene after scene into an intricately woven plot. The reader will be gripped, moved and inspired after following these heroic people through the pages of this novel as they fight for a better world.

Illustrated.